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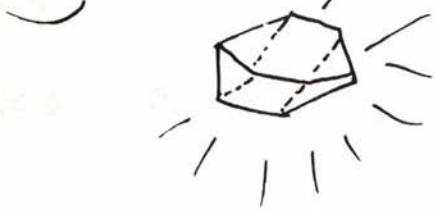

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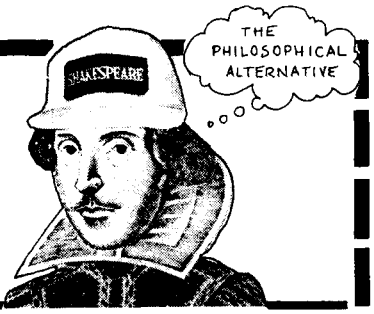

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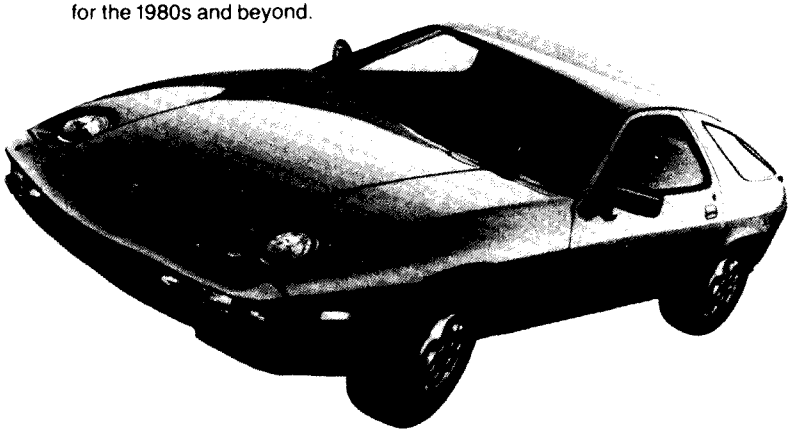

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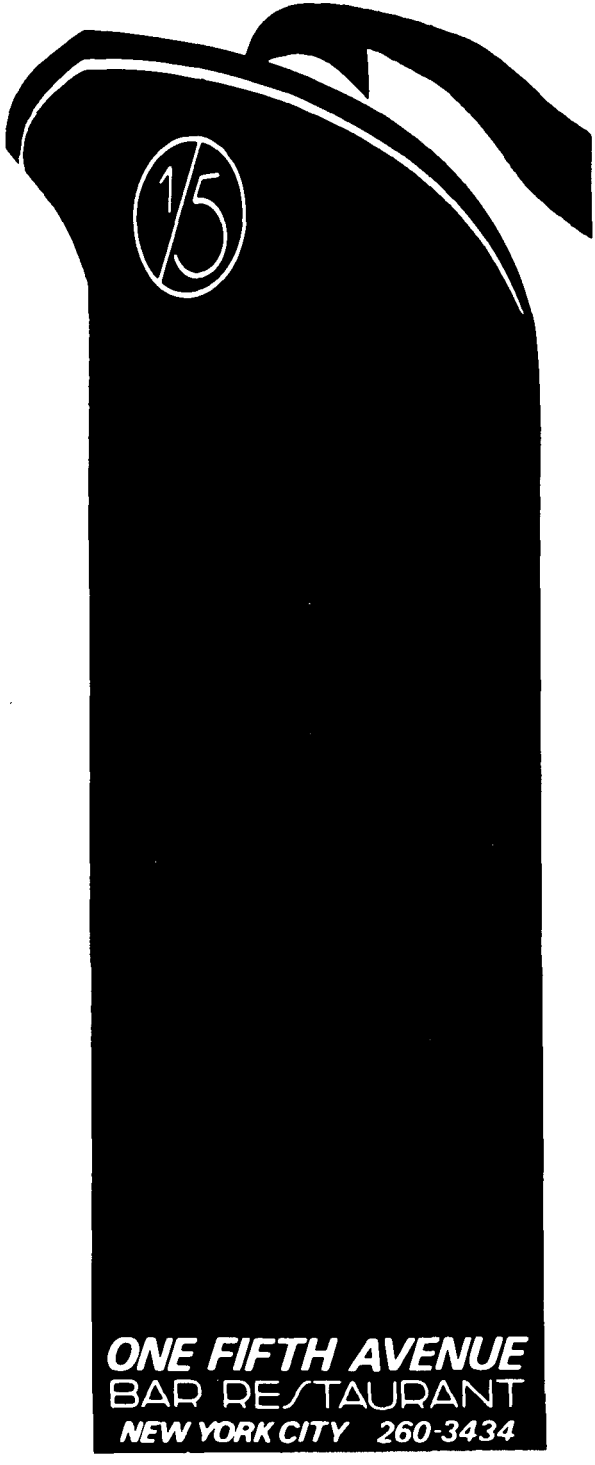

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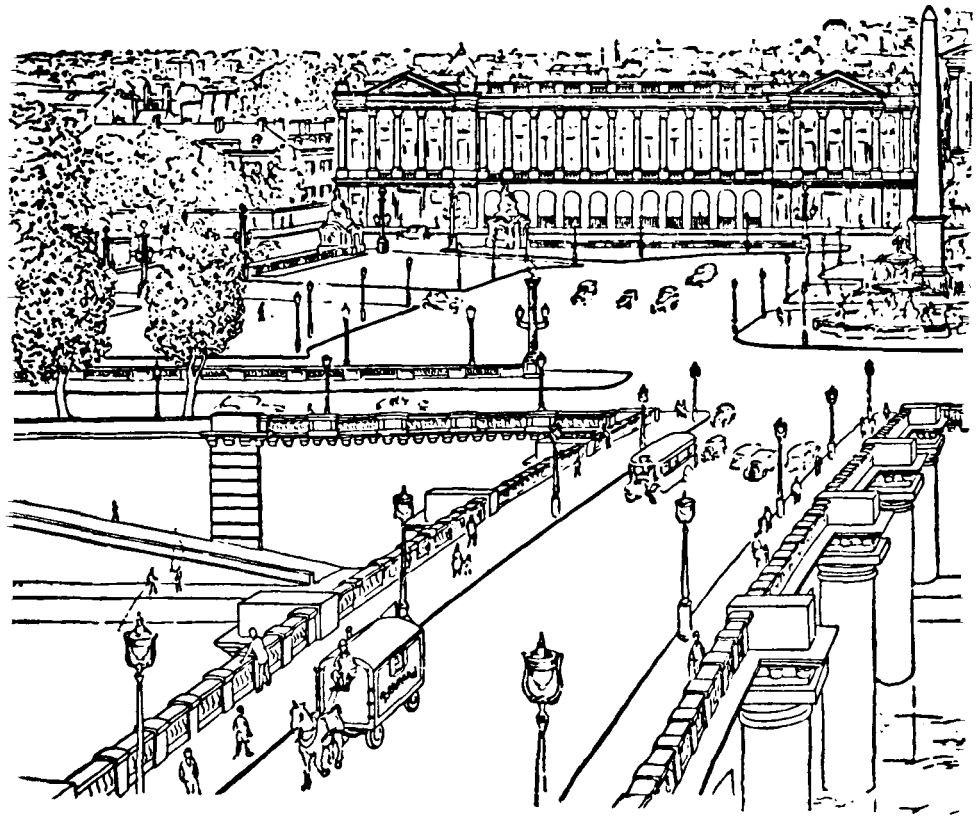

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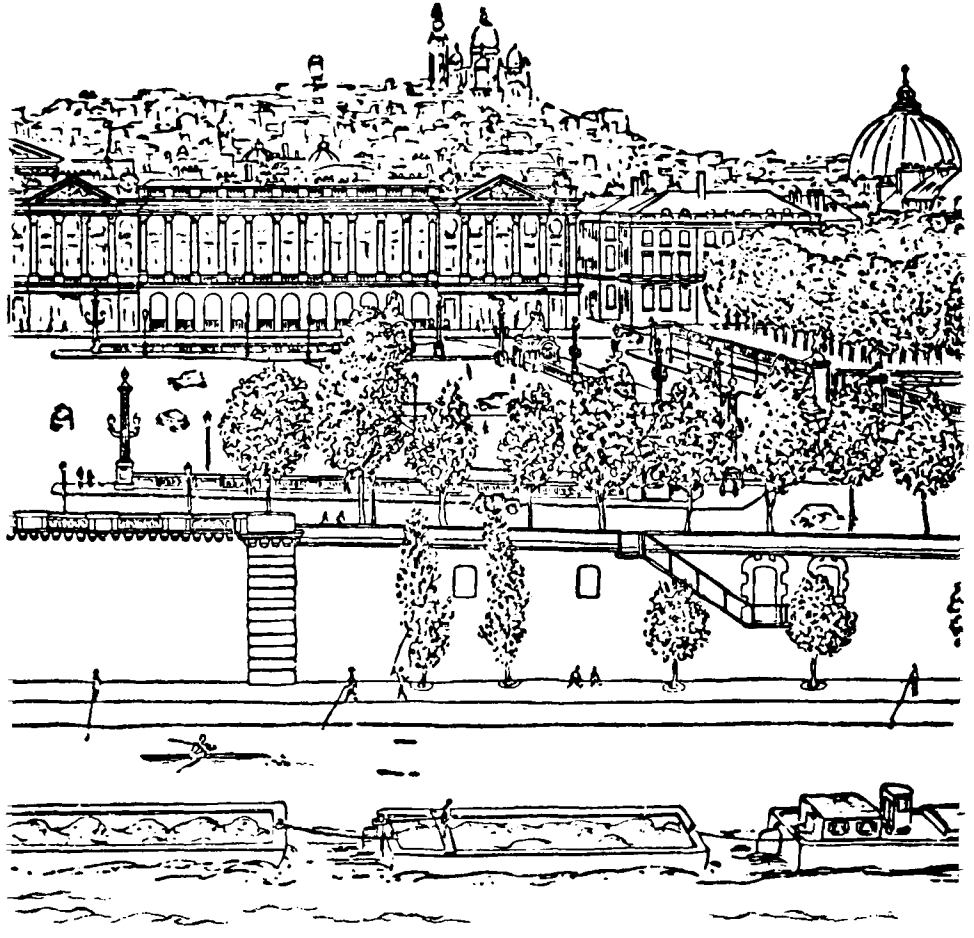

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Making Friends

Joy Williams

Willie and Liberty broke into a house on Crab Key and lived there for a week. Crab Key was tiny and exclusive, belonging to an association which had armed security patrol. The houses on Crab Key were owned by people so wealthy that they were hardly ever there. They were elsewhere.

Liberty and Willie saw the guard daily. He was an old, lonely man, rather glossy and puffed up, his jaw puckered in and his chest puffed out like a child concentrating on making a muscle. He told Willie he had a cancer but that grapefruit was curing it. Willie and Liberty must have reminded him of people he knew, people who must have looked appropriate living in a $300,000 cypress villa on the beach. He thought they were guests of the owners.

Willie did have a look to him. People would babble on to Willie as though in his implacability they would find their grace. Liberty couldn't understand it herself. Willie's detail was gone. He had a closed sleek face which did not transmit impressions. He was tight as a jar of jam. People were crazy

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about Willie.

"If I were young, I wouldn't be here," the guard said. "The big show is definitely not way out here."

"The big show is in our heads," Willie said. Willie and the guard got along famously.

In the house, Clem was lying before the sliding glass doors, his breath making small parachuting souls on the glass. Clem was Liberty's dog, a big white Alsatian with one blind eye. His good eye was open, watching his vacation.

The guard said, "You know, I'll tell you, my name is Turnupseed."

"Glad to know you," Willie said.

"That name mean nothing to you?"

"I don't believe it does," Willie said.

The guard shook his head back and forth, back and forth. "How quickly they forget," he said to an imaginary person on his right.

Liberty said nothing. She supposed they were about to be arrested. She and Willie were young, but they had been breaking into other people's houses for many years now. They were bound to get arrested someday.

"My nephew Donald Gene Turnupseed killed Jimmy Dean. You know, his car ran into Jimmy Dean's car."

"Well," Willie said, "1955."

"It seems like a long time ago, but I don't see what difference that makes," Turnupseed said. "We are talking about something immortal here. Young girls have made a cult of Dean even though he was a faggot."

"Life is not a masterpiece," Willie agreed.

"Life is a damn mess," the guard said. He seemed genuinely outraged.

Turnupseed enjoyed cooking. In inclement weather, he could be seen sitting in his patrol car reading cookbooks. He loved reading cookbooks. He and Willie would speak with fervor about chili and cassoulets and pineapple glazed yams and pastry sucrée.

"Your wife looks sad," Turnupseed said to Willie. "Has she had a loss recently?"

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"She's just one of those wives," Willie said.

"What do women want, let me ask you that," Turnupseed said. "My last two wives always maintained they were miserable even though they had every distraction and convenience. Number Two had a four-wheel drive vehicle with a personalized license plate. Every week she'd have her hair done. She died of a stroke, at the beauty shop, under the dryer."

"Liberty isn't distracted easily," Willie said.

"What would our lives be without our distractions," Turnupseed said, "that's the question."

The house that Liberty and Willie had taken as their own was simple and soaring, but it was cluttered within. The owners seemed to possess everything in triplicate except for reading material. The only thing to read was a newspaper seven weeks old. Liberty kept glancing at it. There were two items of considerable interest, she thought.

One was an article about trees. It said that each person in the world needs all the oxygen produced in a year by a tree with 30,000 leaves.

The other item was about babies. A nurse had made the first error. She had mixed up two newborn babies and given them to the wrong mother for nursing. A second nurse on a different shift switched them back again. The first nurse, realizing her initial error, switched them a third time, switched the little plastic bracelets on their chubby wrists, switched the coded scribbled plastic inserts on their rolling baskets. At this point, the situation had become hopelessly scrambled. Three days passed. The mothers went home with the wrong babies. This was not a Prince and Pauper type story. Both mothers had nice homes and fathers and siblings for the baby. Four months later, the hospital called and told the mothers that they had the wrong babies. They had proof. Toe prints and blood types. Chemical proof. They had done the things professionals do to prove that a person is the person he is supposed to be. The mothers were hysterical. They had fallen in love with the wrong baby and now they didn't want to give their wrong baby up. But apparently it had to be done. It seemed to be the law.

Breaking into houses caused Liberty to become pensive. She

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would get cramps and lose her appetite. Stolen houses made her think of babies all the time. She supposed that was common enough.

The house on Crab Key had chocolate colored wall-to-wall carpeting scattered with Oriental rugs. It had a Mexican tiled tub that could accommodate four. The Italian chrome and 'mica kitchen contained every mechanized friend known to the cook and the cupboards were filled with canned goods. There was a closet off the bath which contained nothing but toilet paper.

"This is how the elderly prepare for nuclear attack," Willie said, staring in at the treasury of white two-ply.

Willie loved living in other people's houses and sleeping in their beds. He wore their clothes and drank their liquor and saw himself in their mirrors. He got a very satisfying hit from breaking into houses and living an ordered life.

In this particular house there was a large walk-in closet. There were mirrors and cosmetics. There were shoe boxes and garment bags. There were hats and ties. Everything was neatly categorized. *Cruise Wear. Ethnic Shawls and Dresses. Daddy's WW I Uniforms.* As in the other homes Liberty and Willie tended to occupy, the absent owners were organized, hopeful, acquisitive and fearful of death.

It was astonishing to Liberty that all this was being guarded by Turnupseed, a man obsessed with woks, dead wives and movie stars, and armed with a floating flashlight and a tire iron. He was obviously not in the best of health. His eyes were like breakfast buns spread with guava jelly. To Liberty, he said, "That certainly is the strangest white dog I've ever seen. Nothing unfortunate is about to happen to you, not if that dog can help it."

"I don't know," Liberty said.

"Thank god, it ain't a black dog. Black dogs are bad luck."

"Thank god," Liberty said. The thought of a black dog! Black as dirt and filled with blood. She would never have a black dog.

Liberty and Turnupseed gazed at one another. Liberty and Turnupseed just couldn't seem to build up a dialogue.

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"Where'd you get that dog?" Turnupseed asked, cranking up again, his voice hoarse.

"Found him," Liberty said.

"I've never found a thing myself," Turnupseed said. "I try not to dwell on it." He gazed at Clem, not knowing how to salute him.

Turnupseed lived on the mainland in a little cement block house on land sucked senseless by the phosphate interests.

"I've had three wives and each one of them died," Turnupseed confided. "Isn't that a ghastly coincidence?"

"In continuity there is a little of everything in everything else," Willie said when Liberty just couldn't seem to pick anything out of the air. Willie and the guard seemed to have a way of conversing that was satisfying to them both. Willie enjoyed a simple deceit more than just about anything in the world, Liberty guessed. Nobody at all seemed to grasp what she and Willie were doing. Liberty began to feel unreal. The words Willie exchanged with Turnupseed rocked gently in her head, unwholesome crafts on a becalmed sea.

Nonetheless, the days passed. In the mornings, Liberty trudged along with Clem on the wide, shelly beach. There she met women who searched for sharks' teeth. These women had elaborate tooth scoopers made of screening and wood. They had spotting scoops and dip boxes. They were dedicated and purposeful, and hustling in and out of the surf, they knew what they were about. Liberty admired them. They knew the difference between a spinner's tooth and a lemon's. They were happy women, rigorous in their selections. In their bags they had duskys' and blacktips' and makos' teeth. They loved those teeth. In their homes, lamplight glowed from wired glass bases filled with teeth. The women who searched the beaches put their finest teeth on velvet and framed them behind glass. The more common teeth spelled out homilies or were arranged in the shape of hearts. These women on the beach knew what was necessary to them.

None of them spoke to Liberty. They regarded Clem with downright unease as though fearing he would squat on their

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fossiliferous wash-ins. Liberty felt that the women were correct in not introducing themselves and being friendly. She, Liberty, was a thief and a depressive. She had been married by a drunken judge at Monroe Station in the Everglades. The bridal couple had eaten their wedding supper in a restaurant which had antique rifles and dried chicken feet mounted on the wall. Their wedding supper had consisted of a gigantic snook that Willie had miraculously caught on a dough ball, and cake that the cook had whipped up special. They had gotten drunk and ended up throwing pieces of cake at each other.

Those women probably saw Liberty's problems just written all over her. As for Clem, they avoided him like shoppers swerving from a swollen can of bouillabaisse.

When the mornings departed, leaving the afternoons, Liberty went back to the house and took a nap, dreaming of the things she did in stolen houses, churches and flowers and suitcases, bowls and water and caves.

Usually when she woke up, Willie was taking a picture of her. He had found a camera in the house and half a dozen rolls of film. (The owners were prepared for anything. They were prepared to shoot the end.) Willie took shots of Liberty eating from a can of peaches. He took shots of her in her mildewy bikini. He took shots of her with a sea oat between her teeth and an aspirin in her hand. Liberty saw that her life was being recorded in some way. Nevertheless, she was aware that her moments lacked incident.

Willie took pictures of Turnupseed as well. Turnupseed was tired. He was tired of the responsibility. "Looking back on it," he said, "if I had to do it all over again, I just don't know if I could."

Willie said, "We can't disown the light into which we're born."

In the hot, simple, uncaring light, Turnupseed gave a smile rather like a little baby's. "You've got a lot of my first wife in you, son. What a sweetie she was. Number One was the one I really boogied with if you know what I mean. She said that being sad separates a person from God."

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"She said that?" Willie wondered.

"I believe she used those very words," Turnupseed said.

Willie put the rolls of film in an antique brass bowl on the floor in the middle of the living room. Liberty took them outside at noon and broke the film from the cassettes. She would give the strips to Yvonne, a child she knew. Yvonne would undoubtedly use the film in a creative manner. She might attach the coils to her headband and pretend she was a princess from the planet Uytnor. The sheets of film would be her face. Things had uses for which they were not intended certainly. That's what made a person keep getting up in the morning.

That was their last day in the house. They saw Turnupseed staggering along the beach with an enormous Glad bag filled with empty beer cans.

"There's enough aluminum on the beaches of Florida to build an airplane," Turnupseed said.

"We've got to be off now," Willie said. "We're leaving."

"Leaving this radiant place," Turnupseed said. "Well, I don't blame you. Last night, you know, in town, I just could swear I saw my middle wife in the laundromat. She didn't speak to me."

"Well, the dead can't disappear," Willie said. "After all, where would they go?"

"I like your manner son, I'm going to miss you," Turnupseed said. "Take care of that wife of yours. She seems to be living in a world where this don't follow that, if you know what I mean."

Later, when the Crab Key Association discovered that Turnupseed had been on such excellent terms with the besmirchers, an aneurysm would smack into Turnupseed's heart with the grace of a speeding Cadillac kissing a box turtle. Liberty could still see him waving good-bye.

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Charles Baudelaire

translated by Richard Howard

To the Reader

Stupidity, delusion, selfishness and lust
torment our bodies and possess our minds,
and we sustain our affable remorse
the way a beggar nourishes his lice.

Our sins are stubborn, our contrition lame;
we want our scruples to be worth our while—
how cheerfully we crawl back to the mire:
a few cheap tears will wash our stains away!

Satan Trismegistus subtly rocks
our ravished spirits on his wicked bed
until the precious metal of our will
is leached out by this cunning alchemist:

the Devil's hand directs our every move—
the things we loathed become the things we love;
day by day we drop through stinking shades
quite undeterred on our descent to Hell.

Like a poor profligate who sucks and bites
the withered breast of some well-seasoned trull,
we snatch in passing at clandestine joys
and squeeze the oldest orange hardest yet.

Wriggling in our brains like a million worms,
a demon demos holds its revels there,

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and when we breathe, the Lethe in our lungs
trickles sighing on its secret course.

If rape and arson, poison and the knife
have not yet stitched their ludicrous designs
onto the banal buckram of our fates,
it is because our souls lack enterprise!

But here among the scorpions and the lice,
the jackals, apes and vultures, snakes and wolves,
monsters that howl and growl and squeal and crawl,
in all the squalid zoo of vices, one

is even uglier and fouler than the rest,
although the least flamboyant of the lot;
this beast would gladly undermine the earth
and swallow all creation in a yawn;

I speak of Boredom which with ready tears
dreams of hangings as it puffs its pipe.
Reader, you know this squeamish monster well,
—hypocrite reader,—my alias,—my twin!

The Mask

Allegorical Statue in the Style
of the Renaissance

It is a legacy of Tuscan skill;
see how the holy sisters, Power and Grace,
sustain this woman's beauty in a form
so faultless as to seem miraculous—
given pride of place above rich beds
to charm a prince's leisure, or a pope's. . .

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—Notice the faint voluptuous smile that shows,
that *shares* the consummation of Desire;
observe that teasing glance which penetrates
the subtle coquetry of gauzy veils
around a face whose every feature speaks,
not just the parted lips too shy to boast:
"When Lust commands me, even Love obeys!"
Look how the languor in her posture adds
a certain mischief to this majesty;
come closer—walk around her loveliness. . .

What blasphemy of art is this! Upon
a body made to offer every bliss
appear. . . two heads! A monster? No—

one is merely a mask, a grinning cheat
that smile, illumined with exquisite care.
Look there: contorted in her misery,
the actual head, the woman's countenance
lost in the shadow of the lying mask. . .
Pathos of true beauty! the bright tears
trickle into my astonished heart;
your lie intoxicates me, and my soul
slakes its passion in your brimming eyes!

—Why is she weeping? Surely such a face
would put all mankind, vanquished, at her feet!
What secret evil feeds on her firm flesh?

—She weeps, you fool, for having lived! and for
living—yet what she laments the most,
what makes her body tremble head to toe,
is that tomorrow she will have to live,
and all tomorrows after—like ourselves!

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Romantic Sunset

The sun is all very well when it rises—then
who minds returning its abrupt salute?
But fortunate the man who still can find
room in his heart for its high-flown farewell!

Take my case. I've seen all nature swoon
under that gaze, like an over-driven heart.
Late as it is, who can resist the West
and the hope of entertaining one last ray. . .

No use following! The god withdraws,
and darkness comes into its own. The world
is cold and wet and full of mysteries;

a mortuary odor rises from the marsh
where my uncertain footsteps try to keep
from squashing frogs or snakes or something worse. . .

Jewels

My darling was naked, or nearly, for knowing my heart
she had left on her jewels, the bangles and chains
whose jingling music gave her the conquering air
of a Moorish slave on days her master is pleased.

Whenever I hear such insolent harmonies,
that scintillating world of metal and stone
beguiles me altogether, and I am enthralled
by objects whose sound is inseparable from light.

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For there she lay on the couch, allowing herself
to be adored, a secret smile indulging
the deep and tenacious currents of my love
which rose against her body like a tide.

Eyes fixed on mine with the speculative glare
of a half-tamed tiger, she kept altering poses,
and the incorporation of candor into lust
gave new charms to her metamorphoses;

calmly I watched, with a certain detachment at first,
as the swan-like arms uncoiled, and then the legs,
the sleek thighs shifting, shiny as oil,
the belly, the breasts—that fruit on my vine—

clustered, more tempting than wicked cherubim,
to undermine what peace I had achieved,
dislodging my soul from its rock-crystal throne
of reflection, once so aloof, so serene.

As if a new Genesis had been at work,
I saw a boy's torso joined to Antiope's hips,
belying that lithe waist by those wide loins. . .
O the pride of rouge on that tawny skin!

And then, the lamp having given up the ghost,
the dying coals made the only light in the room:
each time they heaved another flamboyant sigh,
they flushed that amber-colored flesh with blood!

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Spleen (II)

Souvenirs?
More than if I had lived a thousand years!

No chest of drawers crammed with documents,
love-letters, wedding-invitations, wills,
a lock of someone's hair rolled up in a deed,
hides so many secrets as my brain.
This branching catacombs, this pyramid
contains more corpses than the potter's field:
I am a graveyard that the moon abhors,
where long worms like regrets come out to feed
most ravenously on my dearest dead.
I am an old boudoir where a rack of gowns,
perfumed by withered roses, rots to dust;
where only faint pastels and pale Bouchers
inhale the scent of long-unstoppered flasks.

Nothing is slower than the limping days
when under the heavy weather of the years
Boredom, the fruit of glum indifference,
gains the dimension of eternity. . .
Hereafter, mortal clay, you are no more
than a rock encircled by a nameless dread,
an ancient sphinx omitted from the map,
forgotten by the world, and whose fierce moods
sing only to the rays of setting suns.

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The Sun

Late in this cruel season when the sun
scourges alike the city and the fields,
parching the stubble and sinking into slums
where shuttered hovels hide vile appetites,
I venture out alone to drill myself
in what must seem an eerie fencing-match,
duelling in dark corners for a rhyme
and stumbling over words like cobblestones
where now and then realities collide
with lines I dreamed of writing long ago.

What greensickness could stand up to the sun,
that towering foster-father who dissolves
anxieties into air like morning mist,
ripening here a verse and there a rose
with honey on the tongue as in the hive?
Who but the sun persuades the lame to dance
as if their canes were maypoles, governing
the resurrection of the harrowed fields,
and for the secret harvest of the heart
commands immortal wheat to grow again!

When, with a poet's will, the sun descends
into the cities like a king incognito,
impartially visiting palace and hospital,
the fate of all things vile is glorified.

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Twilight: Daybreak

The morning wind rattles the windowpanes
and over the barracks reveille rings out.

Dreams come now, bad dreams, and teenage boys
burrow into their pillows. Now the lamp
that glowed at midnight seems, like a bloodshot eye,
to throb and throw a red stain on the room;
balked by the stubborn body's weight, the soul
mimics the lamplight's struggles with the dawn.
Like a face in tears—the tears effaced by wind—
the air is tremulous with escaping things,
and Man is tired of writing, Woman of love.

Here and there, chimneys begin to smoke.
Whores, mouths gaping, eyelids gray as ash,
sleep on their feet, leaning against the walls,
and beggar-women, hunched over sagging breasts,
blow on burning sticks, then on their hands.
Now the hungry feel the cold the worst,
and women in labor suffer the sharpest pains;
now, like a sob cut short by a clot of blood,
a rooster crows somewhere; a sea of mist
swirls around the buildings; in the Hôtel-Dieu
the dying breathe their last, while the debauched,
spent by their exertions, sleep alone.

Shivering dawn, in a wisp of pink and green,
totters slowly across the empty Seine,
and dingy Paris—old drudge rubbing its eyes—
picks up its tools to begin another day.

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The Abyss

Pascal had his abyss, it followed him.
But the abyss is All—action and dream,
language, desire!—and who could count the times
the wind of Fear has made my blood run cold!

Each way I turn, above me and below,
tempting and terrible the silence, the space. . .
By night God traces with a knowing hand
unending nightmares on unending dark.

I balk at sleep as if it were a hole
filled with horror, leading God knows where;
my windows open on Infinity,

and haunted by its vertigo my mind
envies the indifference of the void:
will Numbers and Beings never set me free!

The Head of Hair

Ecstatic fleece that ripples to your nape
and reeks of negligence in every curl!
To people my dim cubicle tonight
with memories shrouded in that head of hair,
I'd have it flutter like a handkerchief!

For torpid Asia, torrid Africa
—the wilderness I thought a world away—
survive at the heart of this dark continent. . .

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As other souls set sail to music, mine,
O my love! embarks on your redolent hair.

Take me, tousled current, to where men
as mighty as the trees they live among
submit like them to the sun's long tyranny;
ebony sea, you bear a brilliant dream
of sails and pennants, mariners and masts,

a harbor where my soul can slake its thirst
for color, sound and smell—where ships that glide
through seas of golden silk throw wide
their yardarms to embrace a glorious sky
palpitating in eternal heat.

Drunk, and in love with drunkenness, I'll dive
into this ocean where the other lurks,
and solaced by these waves, my restlessness
will find a fruitful lethargy at last,
rocking forever at aromatic ease.

Blue hair, vault of shadows, be for me
the canopy of overarching sky;
here at the downy roots of every strand
I stupefy myself on the mingled scent
of musk and tar and coconut oil for hours. . .

For hours? Forever! Into that splendid mane
let me braid rubies, ropes of pearls to bind
you indissolubly to my desire—
you the oasis where I dream, the gourd
from which I gulp the wine of memory.

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The Offended Moon

Worshipped once, discreetly, by our sires
as Cynthia, the lamp of secret haunts,
and still attended through blue landscapes by
a blameless harem of the stars, O moon!

do you see the lovers on their prosperous beds,
teeth gleaming where they sleep open-mouthed?
Do you see the poet struggling with his lines?
Or the vipers coupling in the new-mown hay?

Creeping on high in your yellow domino,
do you still, from darkness until dawn,
search out Endymion's outdated charms?

—"What I see is your mother, child of this ruined age,
bent to her looking glass by the weight of years
and skillfully painting the breast that suckled you!"

Confession

Once, indulgent lady—only once
  you lay your lustrous arm
on mine (against the darkness of my soul
  the incident stands out);

as if it had just been coined, a golden moon
  rose ostentatiously,
and night's magnificence, while Paris slept,
  streamed like another Seine.

Along the housefronts, out of every door
  appeared attentive cats,

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following like companionable ghosts
or frozen as we passed.

And even as our intimacy bloomed
in that pale radiance,
there came from you—and from that instrument
of yours, a voice so rich

habitually, exultant as a peal
of trumpets in the dawn—
there came a sound, a sigh, a plaintive note
that faltered on your lips

like a sickly, hideous, misproportioned child,
the family disgrace
long secluded from the world's regard
in some dark hideaway.

"Nothing!" it sobbed, that sudden note of yours,
"nothing on earth is sure,
and all our human masks cannot disguise
our human selfishness;

Beauty is merely woman's livelihood,
a well-rehearsed routine—
the flagging dancer's discipline: to please
with automatic smiles;

hearts are not to be depended on,
they fail—like beauty and love,
until Oblivion gathers up the lot
for good, all over again!"

That magic moon has never left my mind,
that silence, that fatigue,
and that dead secret whispered in despair
at the heart's confessional.

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Meditation

Behave, my Sorrow! let's have no more scenes.
Evening's what you wanted—Evening's here:
a gradual darkness overtakes the town,
bringing peace to some, to others pain.

Now, while humanity racks up remorse
in low distractions under Pleasure's lash,
grovelling for a ruthless master—come
away, my Sorrow, leave them! Give me your hand...

See how the dear departed dowdy years
crowd the balconies of heaven, leaning down,
while smiling out of the sea appears Regret;

the Sun will die in its sleep beneath a bridge,
and trailing westward like a winding-sheet—
listen, my dear!—how softly Night arrives.

Parisian Dream

i

It is a terrible terrain
  no mortal eye has seen
whose image still seduces me
  this morning as it fades...

Sleep is full of miracles!
  Some impulse in my dream
had rid the region I devised
  of every growing thing,

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and proud of the resulting scene
  I savored in my art
the rapturous monotony
  of metal, water, stone. . .

A maze of stairs and arches formed
  an endless palace filled
with basins where the bright cascades
  fell into tarnished gold;

Like crystal curtains, cataracts
  streamed down metal walls,
shimmering where the ripples made
  perpetual descent;

colonnades instead of trees
  shaded sleeping pools
where, vain as women, huge naiads
  marveled at themselves;

pale-blue sheets of water spread
  between the marble quays—
their rims of rose and green converged
  a universe away;

unimaginable gems
  glowed in magic streams;
mirrors dizzily exchanged
  the dazzling world they showed!

Sacred rivers crossed the sky
  in silent unconcern,
pouring the treasure of their urns
  into diamond gulfs.

Architect of such conceits,
  I sent submissive seas
into the jewelled conduits
  my will erected there;

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and every color, even black,
  became a lustrous prism;
liquid turned to glowing glass
  and what was crystal flowed;

yet neither sun nor moon appeared,
  and no horizon paled
to light such wonders—from *within*
  each thing was luminous!

And on these marvels as they moved
  there weighed (without a sound—
the eye alone was master here)
  the silence of the Void.

ii

Waking, dazzled, I was back
  in my familiar slum
and felt returning to my soul
  the curse of all my cares;

with unrelenting strokes the clock
  insisted it was noon,
and shadows poured out of the sky
  upon a sluggish world.

Carrion

Remember, my soul, the thing we saw
  that lovely summer day?
On a pile of stones where the path turned off,
  a hideous carrion—

legs in the air, like a whore—displayed,
  indifferent to the last,

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a belly slick with lethal sweat
  and swollen with foul gas.

The sun lit up that rottenness
  as though to roast it through,
restoring to Nature a hundredfold
  what she had here made one.

And heaven watched the splendid corpse
  like a flower open wide—
you nearly fainted dead away
  at the perfume it gave off.

Flies kept humming over the guts
  from which a gleaming clot
of maggots poured to finish off
  what scraps of flesh remained.

The tide of trembling vermin sank,
  then bubbled up afresh
as if the carcass, drawing breath,
  by *their* lives lived again

and made a curious music there—
  like running water, or wind,
or the rattle of chaff the winnower
  loosens in his fan.

Shapeless—nothing was left but a dream
  the artist had sketched in,
forgotten, and only later on
  finished from memory.

Behind the rocks an anxious bitch
  eyed us reproachfully,
waiting for the chance to resume
  her interrupted feast.

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—Yet you will come to this offence,
this horrible decay,
you, the light of my life, the sun
and moon and stars of my love!

Yes, you will come to this, my queen,
after the sacraments,
when you rot underground among
the bones already there.

But as their kisses eat you up,
my Beauty, tell the worms
I've kept the sacred essence, saved
the form of my rotted loves!

Duellum

Two warriors have engaged in combat: swords
flash and clash together; blood is spilled.
Such passages of arms are the result
of love in its early phase, a loud pursuit.

The blades are broken—like our youth, my dear:
no more than teeth and nails, discreetly filed,
must try where sword and tricky dagger failed.
—O rage of ripened hearts at grips with love!

Our heroes, wickedly entwined, have rolled
into the lynx-infested gulley where
their flesh will fertilize the greedy thorns;

the place is Hell, and crowded with our friends,
so leap right in, my heartless Amazon,
to keep our hatred's fire perpetual.

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"I Prize the Memory . . ."

I prize the memory of naked ages when
Apollo relished gilding marble limbs
whose agile-fleshed originals achieved
their ecstasy with neither fraud nor fear
and, nursed by that companionable sky,
enjoyed the health of a sublime machine.
Cybele then, abundant in her yield,
did not regard her sons as burdensome
but, tenderhearted she-wolf, graciously
suckled the universe at her brown dugs.
Lithe and powerful, a man deserved
his pride in beauties who called him their king—
flawless fruit engendered without shame,
whose ripened flesh asked only to be tried!

Today the poet eager to recall
such human splendor, visiting the sites
where men and women show their nakedness,
must feel a cold revulsion in his soul
at the display of flesh he contemplates.
How these deformities cry out for clothes!
—wretched bodies, regular grotesques,
runty, paunchy, flabby, scrawny, lame,
brats whom Utility, a pitiless god,
has swaddled in his brazen diapers!
Look at the women—pale as tallow, gnawed
and nourished by debauch—the girls who bear
the burden of their mothers' vice or wear
the hideous stigmas of fecundity!

True, in our corruption we possess
beauties unrevealed to ancient times:
countenances cankered by the heart

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and, so to speak, the charm of listlessness;
but subtle though they are, such artifacts
of a belated muse will never keep
our sickly race from offering to youth
its truest homage; youth we worship still,
its frank expression, its untroubled brow,
its eyes as bright as water; sacred youth
that shares—unconscious as a singing bird,
a flower, or the blue sky's radiance—
its song, its scent, its irresistible warmth!

A Strange Man's Dream

to Nadar

Have you felt—I have—a pain that you enjoyed?
Do they say about you, too: "How strange he is!"
—I was dying, and a special agony
filled my eager soul: dread and desire,

anguish and expectation—no sense of revolt.
The closer I came to what would be the end,
the sharper was my torment and the more welcome;
my heart was wrenching free from the usual world.

I was like a child in front of a stage,
hating the curtain as if it were in the way...
Finally the cold truth was revealed:

I had simply died, and the terrible dawn
enveloped me. Could this be all there is?
The curtain was up, and I was waiting still.

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"You Used to Be Jealous. . ."

You used to be jealous of our old nurse
who sleeps, warm heart and all, beneath the sod.
We ought to bring her flowers, even so.
The dead, poor things, have sorrows of their own,
and when October comes and strips the trees
and hums its dismal tune among the graves,
how thankless we the living must appear,
sleeping as we do in our warm beds
while they, subsiding into black despair,
without a bedmate or a joke to share,
worm-eaten skeletons, old and cold, endure
the constant seeping of the winter snows,
the passage of the years, and not one soul
to change the withered wreaths on rusty grilles. . .

When the log I put on the fire hisses and sings,
if I should see her sitting there, quite still,
or if on some cold blue December night
I found her hovering in a corner of my room,
somehow escaping her eternal bed
to cast a motherly eye on her grown-up child,
what could I find to say to this pious soul
as I watched the tears filling her hollow eyes?

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Epigraph for a Banned Book

Gentle reader, being—as you are—
a cautious man of uncorrupted tastes,
lay aside this disobliging work,
as orgiastic as it is abject.

Unless you've graduated from the school
of Satan (devil of a pedagogue!)
the poems will be Greek to you, or else
you'll set me down for one more raving fool.

If, however, your impassive eye
can plunge into the chasms on each page,
read on, my friend: you'll learn to love me yet.

Inquiring spirit, fellow-sufferer
in search, even here, of your own Paradise,
pity me... If not, to Hell with you!

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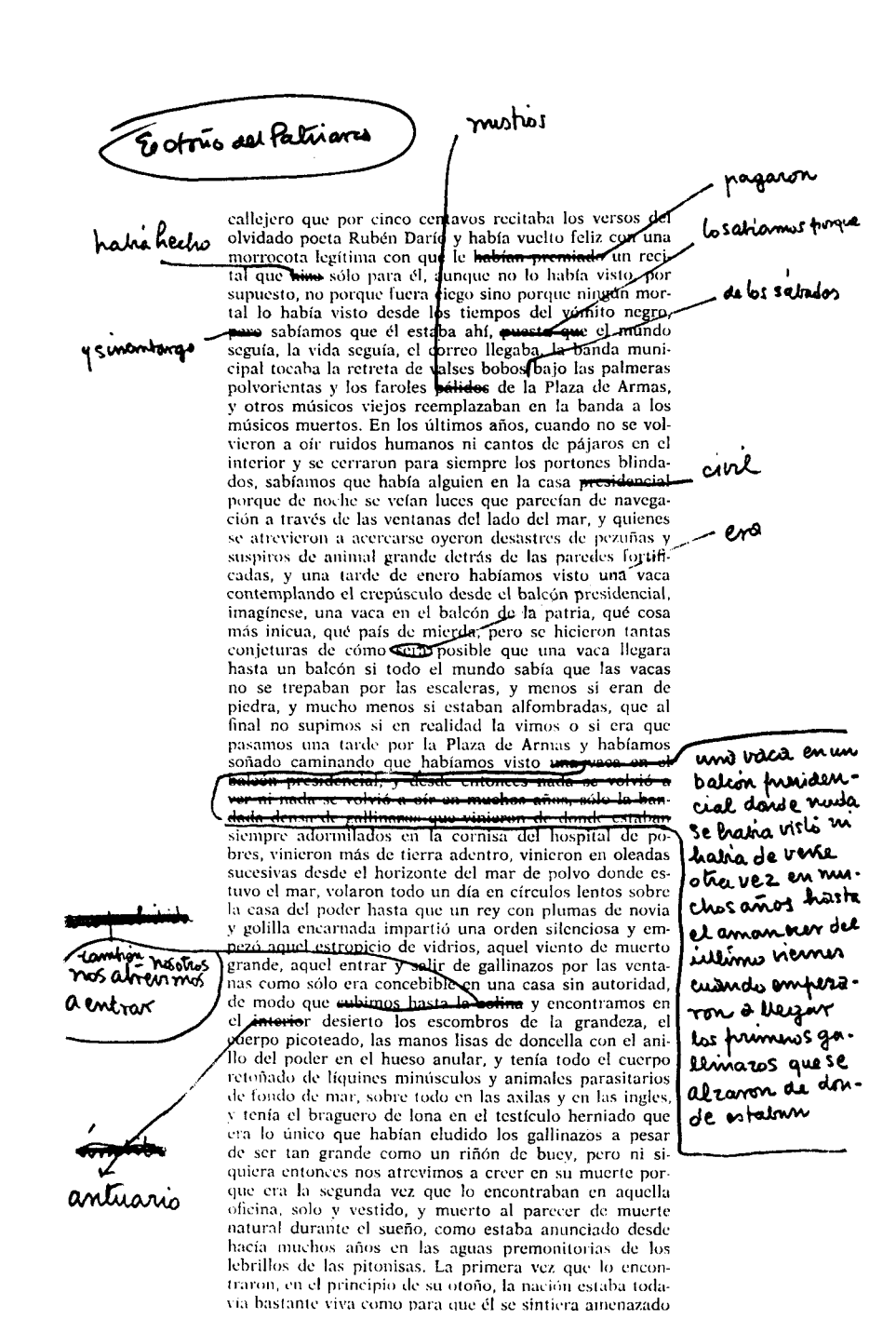

callejero que por cinco centavos recitaba los versos del olvidado poeta Rubén Darío y había vuelto feliz con una morrocota legítima con que le ~~habían premiado~~ un recital que ~~hizo~~ sólo para él, aunque no lo había visto, por supuesto, no porque fuera ciego sino porque ningún mortal lo había visto desde los tiempos del vómito negro, ~~pero~~ sabíamos que él estaba ahí, ~~puesto que~~ el mundo seguía, la vida seguía, el correo llegaba, la banda municipal tocaba la retreta de valses bobos bajo las palmeras polvorientas y los faroles ~~pálidos~~ de la Plaza de Armas, y otros músicos viejos reemplazaban en la banda a los músicos muertos. En los últimos años, cuando no se volvieron a oír ruidos humanos ni cantos de pájaros en el interior y se cerraron para siempre los portones blindados, sabíamos que había alguien en la casa ~~presidencial~~ porque de noche se veían luces que parecían de navegación a través de las ventanas del lado del mar, y quienes se atrevieron a acercarse oyeron desastres de pezuñas y suspiros de animal grande detrás de las paredes fortificadas, y una tarde de enero habíamos visto una vaca contemplando el crepúsculo desde el balcón presidencial, imagínese, una vaca en el balcón de la patria, qué cosa más inicua, qué país de mierda, pero se hicieron tantas conjeturas de cómo ~~sería~~ posible que una vaca llegara hasta un balcón si todo el mundo sabía que las vacas no se trepaban por las escaleras, y menos si eran de piedra, y mucho menos si estaban alfombradas, que al final no supimos si en realidad la vimos o si era que pasamos una tarde por la Plaza de Armas y habíamos soñado caminando que habíamos visto ~~una vaca en el balcón presidencial, y desde entonces nada se volvió a ver ni nada se volvió a oír en muchos años, sólo la bandada de gallinazos que vinieron de donde estaban~~ siempre adormilados en la cornisa del hospital de pobres, vinieron más de tierra adentro, vinieron en oleadas sucesivas desde el horizonte del mar de polvo donde estuvo el mar, volaron todo un día en círculos lentos sobre la casa del poder hasta que un rey con plumas de novia y golilla encarnada impartió una orden silenciosa y empezó aquel estropicio de vidrios, aquel viento de muerto grande, aquel entrar y salir de gallinazos por las ventanas como sólo era concebible en una casa sin autoridad, de modo que ~~subimos hasta la colina~~ y encontramos en el ~~interior~~ desierto los escombros de la grandeza, el cuerpo picoteado, las manos lisas de doncella con el anillo del poder en el hueso anular, y tenía todo el cuerpo retoñado de líquines minúsculos y animales parasitarios de fondo de mar, sobre todo en las axilas y en las ingles, y tenía el braguero de lona en el testículo herniado que era lo único que habían eludido los gallinazos a pesar de ser tan grande como un riñón de buey, pero ni siquiera entonces nos atrevimos a creer en su muerte porque era la segunda vez que lo encontraban en aquella oficina, solo y vestido, y muerto al parecer de muerte natural durante el sueño, como estaba anunciado desde hacía muchos años en las aguas premonitorias de los lebrillos de las pitonisas. La primera vez que lo encontraron, en el principio de su otoño, la nación estaba todavía bastante viva como para que él se sintiera amenazado

A manuscript page from **The Autumn of the Patriarch.**

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Roberto Fernández Salado

The Art of Fiction LXIX

Gabriel García Márquez

Gabriel García Márquez was born in 1928 in the small Colombian town of Aracataca. Surrounded by banana plantations, its neighboring village is called Macondo, which he would later transform into the setting for One Hundred Years of Solitude. *He spent much of his childhood with his grandparents whom he recalls with special fondness as magical storytellers and the early inspiration for many of his novels and short stories. Although he believes his initial literary influences were poetical and mythical, his first published writings were reportorial—appearing in the Colombian newspaper* El Spectador, *where he was a reporter and film critic; for a few years in the*

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mid-1950s he worked as a foreign correspondent based in Rome and Paris.

García Márquez's first short stories were written at night after the other journalists had left the office, but it took a few years and the prodding of a few close friends before they were published. Today his fiction has been translated into more than twenty languages and includes Leaf Storm *(1955),* No One Writes to the Colonel *(1961), and* The Evil Hour *(1962). It wasn't until 1967, however, when* One Hundred Years of Solitude, *a book he had been struggling to write for many years, was published that he achieved international recognition. Immediately hailed as a masterpiece, the novel won the best foreign book prize in 1969 from the Académie française. In 1975,* The Autumn of the Patriarch—*a continuation of his fictional investigation of solitude and its relationship to power—was greeted with equivalently high praise.*

Since 1961 he has made his home in Mexico City with the exception of a few brief stays in Barcelona. He has been married for more than twenty years to his childhood sweetheart, Mercedes, and they have two sons, Rodrigo, a student at Harvard, and Gonsalvo, a flutist studying in Paris.

Gabriel García Márquez was interviewed in his studio/office located just behind his house in San Angel Inn, an old and lovely section, full of the spectacularly colorful flowers of Mexico City. The studio is a short walk from the main house. A low elongated building, it appears to have been originally designed as a guest house. Within, at one end, are a couch, two easy chairs, and a makeshift bar—a small white refrigerator with a supply of acqua minerale *on top.*

The most striking feature of the room is a large blown-up photograph above the sofa of García Márquez alone, wearing a stylish cape and standing on some windswept vista looking somewhat like Anthony Quinn.

García Márquez was sitting at his desk at the far end of the studio. He came to greet me, walking briskly with a light step. He is a solidly built man, only about five-feet-eight or nine in height, who looks like a good middleweight fighter—broad-

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chested, but perhaps a bit thin in the legs. He was dressed casually in corduroy slacks with a light turtleneck sweater and black leather boots. His hair is dark and curly brown and he wears a full moustache.

The interview took place over the course of three late afternoon meetings of roughly two hours each. Although his English is quite good, García Márquez spoke mostly in Spanish and his two teenage sons, who have attended British schools in Mexico and Spain for many years, shared the translating. When García Márquez speaks, his body often rocks back and forth. His hands too are often in motion making small but decisive gestures to emphasize a point, or to indicate a shift of direction in his thinking. He alternates between leaning forward towards his listener, and sitting far back with his legs crossed when speaking reflectively.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about using the tape recorder?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

The problem is that the moment you know the interview is being taped, your attitude changes. In my case I immediately take a defensive attitude. As a journalist, I feel that we still haven't learned how to use a tape recorder to do an interview. The best way, I feel, is to have a long conversation without the journalist taking any notes. Then afterward he should reminisce about the conversation and write it down as an impression of what he felt, not necessarily using the exact words expressed. Another useful method is to take notes and then interpret them with a certain loyalty to the person interviewed. What ticks you off about the tape recording everything is that it is not loyal to the person who is being interviewed, because it even records and remembers when you make an ass of yourself. That's why when there is a tape recorder, I am conscious that I'm being interviewed; when there isn't a tape recorder, I talk in an unconscious and completely natural way.

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INTERVIEWER

Well, you make me feel a little guilty using it, but I think for this kind of an interview we probably need it.

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Anyway, the whole purpose of what I just said was to put you on the defensive.

INTERVIEWER

So you have never used a tape recorder yourself for an interview?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

As a journalist, I never use it. I have a very good tape recorder, but I just use it to listen to music. But then as a journalist I've never done an interview. I've done reports, but never an interview with questions and answers.

INTERVIEWER

I heard about one famous interview with a sailor who had been shipwrecked.

GARCIA MARQUEZ

It wasn't questions and answers. The sailor would just tell me his adventures and I would rewrite them trying to use his own words and in the first person, as if he were the one who was writing. When the work was published as a serial in a newspaper, one part each day for two weeks, it was signed by the sailor, not by me. It wasn't until twenty years later that it was published and people found out I had written it. No editor realized that it was good until after I had written *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

INTERVIEWER

Since we've started talking about journalism, how does it feel being a journalist again, after having written novels for so long? Do you do it with a different feel or a different eye?

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GARCIA MARQUEZ

I've always been convinced that my true profession is that of a journalist. What I didn't like about journalism before were the working conditions. Besides, I had to condition my thoughts and ideas to the interests of the newspaper. Now, after having worked as a novelist, and having achieved financial independence as a novelist, I can really choose the themes that interest me and correspond to my ideas. In any case, I always very much enjoy the chance of doing a great piece of journalism.

INTERVIEWER

What is a great piece of journalism for you?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Hiroshima by John Hersey was an exceptional piece.

INTERVIEWER

Is there a story today that you would especially like to do?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

There are many, and several I have in fact written. I have written about Portugal, Cuba, Angola and Vietnam. I would very much like to write on Poland. I think if I could describe exactly what is now going on, it would be a very important story. But it's too cold now in Poland; I'm a journalist who likes his comforts.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the novel can do certain things that journalism can't?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Nothing. I don't think there is any difference. The sources are the same, the material is the same, the resources and the language are the same. *The Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe is a great novel and *Hiroshima* is a great work of journalism.

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INTERVIEWER

Do the journalist and the novelist have different responsibilities in balancing truth versus the imagination?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

In journalism just one fact that is false prejudices the entire work. In contrast, in fiction one single fact that is true gives legitimacy to the entire work. That's the only difference and it lies in the commitment of the writer. A novelist can do anything he wants so long as he makes people believe in it.

INTERVIEWER

In interviews a few years ago, you seemed to look back on being a journalist with awe at how much faster you were then.

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I do find it harder to write now than before, both novels and journalism. When I worked for newspapers, I wasn't very conscious of every word I wrote, whereas now I am. When I was working for *El Espectador* in Bogotá, I used to do at least three stories a week, two or three editorial notes every day, and I did movie reviews. Then at night, after everyone had gone home, I would stay behind writing my novels. I liked the noise of the Linotype machines which sounded like rain. If they stopped, and I was left in silence, I wouldn't be able to work. Now, the output is comparatively small. On a good working day, working from nine o'clock in the morning to two or three in the afternoon, the most I can write is a short paragraph of four or five lines, which I usually tear up the next day.

INTERVIEWER

Does this change come from your works being so highly praised or from some kind of political commitment?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

It's from both. I think that the idea that I'm writing for many more people than I ever imagined has created a certain general responsibility that is literary and political. There's even

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pride involved, in not wanting to fall short of what I did before.

INTERVIEWER

How did you start writing?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

By drawing. By drawing cartoons. Before I could read or write I used to draw comics at school and at home. The funny thing is that I now realize that when I was in high school I had the reputation of being a writer though I never in fact wrote anything. If there was a pamphlet to be written or a letter of petition, I was the one to do it because I was supposedly the writer. When I entered college I happened to have a very good literary background in general, considerably above the average of my friends. At the university in Bogotá, I started making new friends and acquaintances, who introduced me to contemporary writers. One night a friend lent me a book of short stories by Franz Kafka. I went back to the pension where I was staying and began to read *The Metamorphosis*. The first line almost knocked me off the bed. I was so surprised. The first line reads, "As Gregor Samsa awoke that morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. . . ." When I read the line I thought to myself that I didn't know anyone was allowed to write things like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago. So I immediately started writing short stories. They are totally intellectual short stories because I was writing them on the basis of my literary experience and had not yet found the link between literature and life. The stories were published in the literary supplement of the newspaper *El Espectador* in Bogotá and they did have a certain success at the time—probably because nobody in Colombia was writing intellectual short stories. What was being written then was mostly about life in the countryside and social life. When I wrote my first short stories I was told they had Joycean influences.

INTERVIEWER

Had you read Joyce at that time?

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GARCIA MARQUEZ

I had never read Joyce, so I started reading *Ulysses*. I read it in the only Spanish edition available. Since then, after having read *Ulysses* in English as well as a very good French translation, I can see that the original Spanish translation was very bad. But I did learn something that was to be very useful to me in my future writing—the technique of the interior monologue. I later found this in Virginia Woolf and I like the way she uses it better than Joyce. Although I later realized that the person who invented this interior monologue was the anonymous writer of the *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

INTERVIEWER

Can you name some of your early influences?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

The people who really helped me to get rid of my intellectual attitude towards the short story were the writers of the American Lost Generation. I realized that their literature had a relationship with life that my short stories didn't. And then an event took place which was very important with respect to this attitude. It was the Bogotazo, on the ninth of April, 1948, when a political leader, Gaitan, was shot and the people of Bogotá went raving mad in the streets. I was in my pension ready to have lunch when I heard the news. I ran towards the place, but Gaitan had just been put into a taxi and was being taken to a hospital. On my way back to the pension, the people had already taken to the streets and they were demonstrating, looting stores and burning buildings. I joined them. That afternoon and evening, I became aware of the kind of country I was living in, and how little my short stories had to do with any of that. When I was later forced to go back to Barranquilla on the Caribbean, where I had spent my childhood, I realized that that was the type of life I had lived, knew, and wanted to write about.

Around 1950 or '51 another event happened that influenced my literary tendencies. My mother asked me to accompany her to Aracataca, where I was born, and to sell the house where I

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spent my first years. When I got there it was at first quite shocking because I was now twenty-two and hadn't been there since the age of eight. Nothing had really changed, but I felt that I wasn't really looking at the village, but I was *experiencing* it as if I were reading it. It was as if everything I saw had already been written, and all I had to do was to sit down and copy what was already there and what I was just reading. For all practical purposes everything had evolved into literature: the houses, the people, and the memories. I'm not sure whether I had already read Faulkner or not, but I know now that only a technique like Faulkner's could have enabled me to write down what I was seeing. The atmosphere, the decadence, the heat in the village were roughly the same as what I had felt in Faulkner. It was a banana plantation region inhabited by a lot of Americans from the fruit companies which gave it the same sort of atmosphere I had found in the writers of the Deep South. Critics have spoken of the literary influence of Faulkner but I see it as a coincidence: I had simply found material that had to be dealt with in the same way that Faulkner had treated similar material.

From that trip to the village I came back to write *Leaf Storm*, my first novel. What really happened to me in that trip to Aracataca was that I realized that everything that had occurred in my childhood had a literary value that I was only now appreciating. From the moment I wrote *Leaf Storm* I realized I wanted to be a writer and that nobody could stop me and that the only thing left for me to do was to try to be the best writer in the world. That was in 1953, but it wasn't until 1967 that I got my first royalties after having written five of my eight books.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that it's common for young writers to deny the worth of their own childhoods and experiences and to intellectualize as you did initially?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

No, the process usually takes place the other way around, but if I had to give a young writer some advice I would say to write

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about something that has happened to him; it's always easy to tell whether a writer is writing about something that has happened to him or something he has read or been told. Pablo Neruda has a line in a poem that says "God help me from inventing when I sing." It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes for the imagination while the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality. The problem is that Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination.

INTERVIEWER

Whom were you writing for at this point? Who was your audience?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Leaf Storm was written for my friends who were helping me and lending me their books and were very enthusiastic about my work. In general I think you usually do write for someone. When I'm writing I'm always aware that this friend is going to like this, or that another friend is going to like that paragraph or chapter, always thinking of specific people. In the end all books are written for your friends. The problem after writing *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was that now I no longer know whom of the millions of readers I am writing for; this upsets and inhibits me. It's like a million eyes are looking at you and you don't really know what they think.

INTERVIEWER

What about the influence of journalism on your fiction?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I think the influence is reciprocal. Fiction has helped my journalism because it has given it literary value. Journalism has helped my fiction because it has kept me in a close relationship with reality.

INTERVIEWER

How would you describe the search for a style that you went

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through after *Leaf Storm* and before you were able to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude*?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

After having written *Leaf Storm*, I decided that writing about the village and my childhood was really an escape from having to face and write about the political reality of the country. I had the false impression that I was hiding myself behind this kind of nostalgia instead of confronting the political things that were going on. This was the time when the relationship between literature and politics was very much discussed. I kept trying to close the gap between the two. My influence had been Faulkner; now it was Hemingway. I wrote *No One Writes to the Colonel*, *The Evil Hour*, and *The Funeral of Mama Grand*, which were all written at more or less the same time and have many things in common. These stories take place in a different village from the one in which *Leaf Storm* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* occur. It is a village in which there is no magic. It is a journalistic literature. But when I finished *The Evil Hour*, I saw that all my views were wrong again. I came to see that in fact my writings about my childhood were *more* political and had more to do with the reality of my country than I had thought. After *The Evil Hour* I did not write anything for five years. I had an idea of what I always wanted to do, but there was something missing and I was not sure what it was until one day I discovered the right tone—the tone that I eventually used in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It was based on the way my grandmother used to tell her stories. She told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness. When I finally discovered the tone I had to use, I sat down for eighteen months and worked every day.

INTERVIEWER

How did she express the "fantastic" so naturally?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

What was most important was the expression she had on her face. She did not change her expression at all when telling her

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stories and everyone was surprised. In previous attempts to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, I tried to tell the story without believing in it. I discovered that what I had to do was believe in them myself and write them with the same expression with which my grandmother told them: with a brick face.

INTERVIEWER

There also seems to be a journalistic quality to that technique or tone. You describe seemingly fantastic events in such minute detail that it gives them their own reality. Is this something you have picked up from journalism?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

That's a journalistic trick which you can also apply to literature. For example, if you say that there are elephants flying in the sky, people are not going to believe you. But if you say that there are four hundred and twenty-five elephants in the sky, people will probably believe you. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is full of that sort of thing. That's exactly the technique my grandmother used. I remember particularly the story about the character who is surrounded by yellow butterflies. When I was very small there was an electrician who came to the house. I became very curious because he carried a belt with which he used to suspend himself from the electrical posts. My grandmother used to say that every time this man came around, he would leave the house full of butterflies. But when I was writing this, I discovered that if I didn't say the butterflies were yellow, people would not believe it. When I was writing the episode of Remedios the Beauty going to heaven it took me a long time to make it credible. One day I went out to the garden and saw a woman who used to come to the house to do the wash and she was putting out the sheets to dry and there was a lot of wind. She was arguing with the wind not to blow the sheets away. I discovered that if I used the sheets for Remedios the Beauty, she would ascend. That's how I did it, to make it credible. The problem for every writer is credibility. Anybody can write anything so long as it's believed.

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INTERVIEWER

What was the origin of the insomnia plague in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Beginning with Oedipus, I've always been interested in plagues. I have studied a lot about medieval plagues. One of my favorite books is *The Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe, among other reasons because Defoe is a journalist who sounds like what he is saying is pure fantasy. For many years I thought Defoe had written about the London plague as he observed it. But then I discovered it was a novel, because Defoe was less than seven years old when the plague occurred in London. Plagues have always been one of my recurrent themes—and in different forms. In *The Evil Hour*, the pamphlets are plagues. For many years I thought that the political violence in Colombia had the same metaphysics as the plague. Before *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, I had used a plague to kill all the birds in a story called *The Day After Saturday*. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* I used the insomnia plague as something of a literary trick since it's the opposite of the sleeping plague. Ultimately, literature is nothing but carpentry.

INTERVIEWER

Can you explain that analogy a little more?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Both are very hard work. Writing something is almost as hard as making a table. With both you are working with reality, a material just as hard as wood. Both are full of tricks and techniques. Basically very little magic and a lot of hard work are involved. And as Proust, I think, said, it takes ten percent inspiration and ninety percent perspiration. I never have done any carpentry but it's the job I admire most, especially because you can never find anyone to do it for you.

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INTERVIEWER

What about the banana fever in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*? How much of that is based on what the United Fruit Company did?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

The banana fever is modeled closely on reality. Of course, I've used literary tricks on things which have not been proved historically. For example, the massacre in the square is completely true but while I wrote it on the basis of testimony and documents, it was never known exactly how many people were killed. I used the figure three thousand, which is obviously an exaggeration. But one of my childhood memories was watching a very, very long train leave the plantation supposedly full of bananas. There could have been three thousand dead on it, eventually to be dumped in the sea. What's really surprising is that now they speak very naturally in the Congress and the newspapers about the "three thousand dead." I suspect that half of all our history is made in this fashion. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the dictator says it doesn't matter if it's not true now, because sometime in the future it will be true. Sooner or later people believe writers rather than the government.

INTERVIEWER

That makes the writer pretty powerful, doesn't it?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Yes, and I can feel it too. It gives me a great sense of responsibility. What I would really like to do is a piece of journalism which is completely true and real, but which sounds as fantastic as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The more I live and remember things from the past the more I think that literature and journalism are closely related.

INTERVIEWER

What about a country giving up its sea for its foreign debt as in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*?

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GARCIA MARQUEZ

Yes, but that actually happened. It's happened and will happen many times more. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a completely historical book. To find probabilities out of real facts is the work of the journalist and the novelist, and it is also the work of the prophet. The trouble is that many people believe that I'm a writer of fantastic fiction, when actually I'm a very realistic person and write what I believe is the true socialist realism.

INTERVIEWER

Is it utopian?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I'm not sure if the word utopian means the real or the ideal. But I think it's the real.

INTERVIEWER

Are the characters in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the dictators, for example, modeled after real people? There seem to be similarities with Franco, Perón and Trujillo.

GARCIA MARQUEZ

In every novel, the character is a collage: a collage of different characters that you've known, or heard about or read about. I read everything that I could find about Latin American dictators of the last century, and the beginning of this one. I also talked to a lot of people who had lived under dictatorships. I did that for at least ten years. And when I had a clear idea of what the character was going to be like, I made an effort to forget everything I had read and heard, so that I could invent, without using any situation that had occurred in real life. I realized at one point that I myself had not lived for any period of time under a dictatorship, so I thought if I wrote the book in Spain, I could see what the atmosphere was like living in an established dictatorship. But I found that the atmosphere was very different in Spain under Franco from that of a Caribbean

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dictatorship. So the book was kind of blocked for about a year. There was something missing and I wasn't sure what it was. Then overnight, I decided that the best thing was that we come back to the Caribbean. So we all moved back to Barranquilla in Colombia. I made a statement to the journalists which they thought was a joke. I said that I was coming back because I had forgotten what a guava smelled like. In truth, it was what I really needed to finish my book. I took a trip through the Caribbean. As I went from island to island, I found the elements which were the ones that had been lacking from my novel.

INTERVIEWER

You often use the theme of the solitude of power.

GARCIA MARQUEZ

The more power you have, the harder it is to know who is lying to you and who is not. When you reach absolute power, there is no contact with reality, and that's the worst kind of solitude there can be. A very powerful person, a dictator, is surrounded by interests and people whose final aim is to isolate him from reality; everything is in concert to isolate him.

INTERVIEWER

What about the solitude of the writer? Is this different?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

It has a lot to do with the solitude of power. The writer's very attempt to portray reality often leads him to a distorted view of it. In trying to transpose reality he can end up losing contact with it, in an ivory tower, as they say. Journalism is a very good guard against that. That's why I have always tried to keep on doing journalism because it keeps me in contact with the real world, particularly political journalism and politics. The solitude that threatened me after *One Hundred Years of Solitude* wasn't the solitude of the writer; it was the solitude of fame, which resembles the solitude of power much more. My friends defended me from that one, my friends who are always there.

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INTERVIEWER

How?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Because I have managed to keep the same friends all my life. I mean I don't break or cut myself off from my old friends and they're the ones who bring me back to earth; they always keep their feet on the ground and they're not famous.

INTERVIEWER

How do things start? One of the recurring images in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is the cows in the palace. Was this one of the original images?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I've got a photography book that I'm going to show you. I've said on various occasions that in the genesis of all my books there's always an image. The first image I had of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* was a very old man in a very luxurious palace into which cows come and eat the curtains. But that image didn't concretize until I saw the photograph. In Rome I went into a bookshop where I started looking at photography books, which I like to collect. I saw this photograph and it was just perfect. I just saw that was how it was going to be. Since I'm not a big intellectual, I can find my antecedents in everyday things, in life, and not in the great masterpieces.

INTERVIEWER

Do your novels ever take unexpected twists?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

That used to happen to me in the beginning. In the first stories I wrote I had a general idea of the mood, but I would let myself be taken by chance. The best advice I was given early on was that it was all right to work that way when I was young because I had a torrent of inspiration. But I was told that if I didn't learn technique, I would be in trouble later on when the inspiration had gone and the technique was needed to compensate. If I hadn't learned that in time, I would not now

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be able to outline a structure in advance. Structure is a purely technical problem and if you don't learn it early on you'll never learn it.

INTERVIEWER

Discipline then is quite important to you?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I don't think you can write a book that's worth anything without extraordinary discipline.

INTERVIEWER

What about artificial stimulants?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

One thing that Hemingway wrote that greatly impressed me was that writing for him was like boxing. He took care of his health and his well-being. Faulkner had a reputation of being a drunkard, but in every interview that he gave me he said that it was impossible to write one line when drunk. Hemingway said this too. Bad readers have asked me if I was drugged when I wrote some of my works. But that illustrates that they don't know anything about literature or drugs. To be a good writer you have to be absolutely lucid at every moment of writing and in good health. I'm very much against the romantic concept of writing which maintains that the act of writing is a sacrifice and that the worse the economic conditions or the emotional state, the better the writing. I think you have to be in a very good emotional and physical state. Literary creation for me requires good health, and the Lost Generation understood this. They were people who loved life.

INTERVIEWER

Blaise Cendrars said that writing is a privilege compared to most work and that writers exaggerate their suffering. What do you think?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I think that writing is very difficult, but so is any job carefully

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executed. What is a privilege, however, is to do a job to your own satisfaction. I think that I'm excessively demanding of myself and others because I cannot tolerate errors; I think that it is a privilege to do anything to a perfect degree. It is true though that writers are often megalomaniacs and they consider themselves to be the center of the universe and society's conscience. But what I most admire is something well done. I'm always very happy when I'm traveling to know that the pilots are better pilots than I am a writer.

INTERVIEWER

When do you work best now? Do you have a work schedule?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

When I became a professional writer the biggest problem I had was my schedule. Being a journalist meant working at night. When I started writing full-time I was forty years old, my schedule was basically from nine o'clock in the morning until two in the afternoon when my sons came back from school. Since I was so used to hard work, I felt guilty that I was only working in the morning; so I tried to work in the afternoons, but I discovered that what I did in the afternoon had to be done over again the next morning. So I decided that I would just work from nine until two-thirty and not do anything else. In the afternoons I have appointments and interviews and anything else that might come up. I have another problem in that I can only work in surroundings that are familiar and have already been warmed up with my work. I cannot write in hotels or borrowed rooms or on borrowed typewriters. This creates problems because when I travel I can't work. Of course, you're always trying to find a pretext to work less. That's why the conditions you impose on yourself are more difficult all the time. You hope for inspiration whatever the circumstances. That's a word the romantics exploited a lot. My Marxist comrades have a lot of difficulty accepting the word, but whatever you call it, I'm convinced that there is a special state of mind in which you can write with great ease and things just flow. All the pretexts—such as the one where you can only write at home—

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disappear. That moment and that state of mind seem to come when you have found the right theme and the right ways of treating it. And it has to be something you really like too, because there is no worse job than doing something you don't like.

One of the most difficult things is the first paragraph. I have spent many months on a first paragraph and once I get it, the rest just comes out very easily. In the first paragraph you solve most of the problems with your book. The theme is defined, the style, the tone. At least in my case, the first paragraph is a kind of sample of what the rest of the book is going to be. That's why writing a book of short stories is much more difficult than writing a novel. Every time you write a short story, you have to begin all over again.

INTERVIEWER

Are dreams ever important as a source of inspiration?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

In the very beginning I paid a good deal of attention to them. But then I realized that life itself is the greatest source of inspiration and that dreams are only a very small part of that torrent that is life. What is very true about my writing is that I'm quite interested in different concepts of dreams and interpretations of them. I see dreams as part of life in general, but reality is much richer. But maybe I just have very poor dreams.

INTERVIEWER

Can you distinguish between inspiration and intuition?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Inspiration is when you find the right theme, one which you really like; that makes the work much easier. Intuition, which is also fundamental to writing fiction, is a special quality which helps you to decipher what is real without needing scientific knowledge, or any other special kind of learning. The laws of gravity can be figured out much more easily with intuition than anything else. It's a way of having experience without having to

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struggle through it. For a novelist intuition is essential. Basically it's contrary to intellectualism which is probably the thing that I detest most in the world—in the sense that the real world is turned into a kind of immovable theory. Intuition has the advantage that either it is, or it isn't. You don't struggle to try to put a round peg into a square hole.

INTERVIEWER

Is it the theorists that you dislike?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Exactly. Chiefly because I cannot really understand them. That's mainly why I have to explain most things through anecdotes, because I don't have any capacity for abstractions. That's why many critics say that I'm not a cultured person. I don't quote enough.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that critics type you or categorize you too neatly?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Critics for me are the biggest example of what intellectualism is. First of all, they have a theory of what a writer should be. They try to get the writer to fit their model and if he doesn't fit they still try to get him in by force. I'm only answering this because you've asked. I really have no interest in what critics think of me; nor have I read critics in many years. They have claimed for themselves the task of being intermediaries between the author and the reader. I've always tried to be a very clear and precise writer trying to reach the reader directly without having to go through the critic.

INTERVIEWER

How do you regard translators?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I have great admiration for translators except for the ones

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who use footnotes. They are always trying to explain to the reader something which the author probably did not mean; since it's there the reader has to put up with it. Translating is a very difficult job, not at all rewarding, and very badly paid. A good translation is always a recreation in another language. That's why I have such great admiration for Gregory Rabassa. My books have been translated into twenty-one languages and Rabassa is the only translator who has never asked for something to be clarified so he can put a footnote in. I think that my work has been completely recreated in English. There are parts of the book which are very difficult to follow literally. The impression one gets is that the translator read the book and then rewrote it from his recollections. That's why I have such admiration for translators. They are intuitive rather than intellectual. Not only is what publishers pay them completely miserable, but they don't see their work as literary creation. There are some books I would have liked to translate into Spanish, but they would have involved as much work as writing my own books and I wouldn't have made enough money to eat.

INTERVIEWER

What would you have liked to translate?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

All Malraux. I would have liked to translate Conrad, and Saint Exupéry. When I'm reading I sometimes get the feeling that I would like to translate this book. Excluding the great masterpieces, I prefer reading a mediocre translation of a book than trying to get through it in the original language. I never feel comfortable reading in another language, because the only language I really feel inside is Spanish. However, I speak Italian and French, and I know English well enough to have poisoned myself with *Time* magazine every week for twenty years.

INTERVIEWER

Does Mexico seem like home to you now? Do you feel part of any larger community of writers?

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GARCIA MARQUEZ

In general, I'm not a friend of writers or artists just because they are writers or artists. I have many friends of different professions, amongst them writers and artists. In general terms, I feel that I'm a native of any country in Latin America but not elsewhere. Latin Americans feel that Spain is the only country in which we are treated well, but I personally don't feel as though I'm from there. In Latin America I don't have a sense of frontiers or borders. I'm conscious of the differences that exist from one country to another, but in my mind and heart it is all the same. Where I really feel at home is the Caribbean, whether it is the French, Dutch, or English Caribbean. I was always impressed that when I got on a plane in Barranquilla, a black lady with a blue dress would stamp my passport, and when I got off the plane in Jamaica, a black lady with a blue dress would stamp my passport, but in English. I don't believe that the language makes all that much difference. But anywhere else in the world, I feel like a foreigner, a feeling that robs me of a sense of security. It's a personal feeling, but I always have it when I travel. I have a minority conscience.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that it's an important thing for Latin American writers to live in Europe for awhile?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Perhaps to have a real perspective from outside. The book of short stories I'm thinking of writing is about Latin Americans going to Europe. I've been thinking about it for twenty years. If you could draw a final conclusion out of these short stories it would be that Latin Americans hardly ever get to Europe, especially Mexicans, and certainly not to stay. All the Mexicans I've ever met in Europe always leave the following Wednesday.

INTERVIEWER

What effects do you think the Cuban Revolution has had on Latin American literature?

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GARCIA MARQUEZ

Up until now it has been negative. Many writers who think of themselves as being politically committed feel obligated to write stories not about what they want, but about what they think they should want. That makes for a certain type of calculated literature that doesn't have anything to do with experience or intuition. The main reason for this is that the cultural influence of Cuba on Latin America has been very much fought against. In Cuba itself, the process hasn't developed to the point where a new type of literature or art has been created. That is something that needs time. The great cultural importance of Cuba in Latin America has been to serve as a kind of bridge to transmit a type of literature which had existed in Latin America for many years. In a sense, the boom in Latin American literature in the United States has been caused by the Cuban Revolution. Every Latin American writer of that generation had been writing for twenty years but the European and American publishers had very little interest in them. When the Cuban Revolution started there was suddenly a great interest about Cuba and Latin America. The revolution turned into an article of consumption. Latin America came into fashion. It was discovered that Latin American novels existed which were good enough to be translated and considered with all other world literature. What was really sad is that cultural colonialism is so bad in Latin America that it was impossible to convince the Latin Americans themselves that their own novels were good until people outside *told* them they were.

INTERVIEWER

Are there some lesser-known Latin American writers you especially admire?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I doubt there are any now. One of the best side effects of the boom in Latin American writing is that publishers are always on the lookout to make sure that they're not going to miss the new Cortázar. Unfortunately many young writers are more concerned with fame than with their own work. There's a French

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professor at the University of Toulouse who writes about Latin American literature; many young authors wrote to him telling him not to write so much about me because I didn't need it anymore and other people did. But what they forget is that when I was their age the critics weren't writing about me, but rather about Miguel Angel Asturias. The point I'm trying to make is that these young writers are wasting their time writing to critics rather than working on their own writing. It's much more important to write than to be written about. One thing that I think was very important about my literary career was that until I was forty years old, I never got one cent of author's royalties though I'd had five books published.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that fame or success coming too early in a writer's career is bad?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

At any age it's bad. As I said before I would have liked for my books to have been recognized posthumously, at least in capitalist countries where you turn into a kind of merchandise.

INTERVIEWER

Aside from your favorites, what do you read today?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I read the weirdest things. I was reading Muhammad Ali's memoirs the other day. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is a great book and one I probably would not have read many years ago because I would have thought it was a waste of time. But I never really get involved with a book unless it's recommended by somebody I trust. I don't read any more fiction. I read many memoirs and documents, even if they are forged documents. And I reread my favorites. The advantage of rereading is that you can open at any page and read the part that you really like. I've lost this sacred notion of reading only "literature." I will read anything. I try to keep up to date. I read almost all the really important magazines from all over the world every week.

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I've always been on the lookout for news since the habit of reading the teletype machines. But after I've read all the serious and important newspapers from all over, my wife always comes around and tells me of news I hadn't heard. When I ask her where she read it, she will say that she read it in a magazine at the beauty parlor. So I read fashion magazines and all kinds of magazines for women and gossip magazines. And I learn many things that I could only learn from reading them. That keeps me very busy.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think fame is so destructive for a writer?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Primarily because it invades your private life. It takes away from the time that you spend with friends, and the time that you can work. It tends to isolate you from the real world. A famous writer who wants to continue writing has to be constantly defending himself against fame. I don't really like to say this because it never sounds sincere, but I would really have liked for my books to have been published after my death, so I wouldn't have to go through all this business of fame and being a great writer. In my case, the only advantage in fame is that I have been able to give it a political use. Otherwise, it is quite uncomfortable. The problem is that you're famous for twenty-four hours a day and you can't say, "Okay, I won't be famous until tomorrow" or press a button and say, "I won't be famous here or now."

INTERVIEWER

Did you anticipate the extraordinary success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I knew that it would be a book that would please my friends more than my others had. But when my Spanish publisher told me he was going to print eight thousand copies I was stunned because my other books had never sold more than seven

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hundred. I asked him why not start slowly, but he said he was convinced that it was a good book and that all eight thousand copies would be sold between May and December. Actually they were all sold within one week in Buenos Aires.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think *One Hundred Years of Solitude* clicked so?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I don't have the faintest idea because I'm a very bad critic of my own works. One of the most frequent explanations that I've heard is that it is a book about the private lives of the people of Latin America, a book that was written from the inside. That explanation surprises me because in my first attempt to write it the title of the book was going to be *The House*. I wanted the whole development of the novel to take place inside the house and anything external would be just in terms of its impact on the house. I later abandoned the title *The House*, but once the book goes into the town of Macondo it never goes any further. Another explanation I've heard, is that every reader can make of the characters in the book what he wants and make them his own. I don't want it to become a film since the film viewer sees a face that he may not have imagined.

INTERIVIEWER

Was there any interest in making it into a film?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Yes, my agent put it up for one million dollars to discourage offers and as they approximated that offer she raised it to around three million. But I have no interest in a film, and as long as I can prevent it from happening, it won't. I prefer that it remain a private relationship between the reader and the book.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think any books can be translated into films successfully?

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GARCIA MARQUEZ

I can't think of any one film that improved on a good novel but I can think of many good films that came from very bad novels.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever thought of making films yourself?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

There was a time when I wanted to be a film director. I studied directing in Rome. I felt that cinema was a medium which had no limitations and in which everything was possible. I came to Mexico because I wanted to work in film not as a director but as a screenplay writer. But there's a big limitation in cinema in that it's an industrial art, a whole industry. It's very difficult to express in cinema what you really want to say. I still think of it, but it now seems like a luxury which I would like to do with friends but without any hope of really expressing myself. So I've moved farther and farther away from the cinema. My relation with it is like that of a couple who can't live separated, but who can't live together either. Between having a film company or a journal though, I'd choose a journal.

INTERVIEWER

How would you describe the book on Cuba that you're working on now?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

Actually, the book is like a long newspaper article about what life in Cuban homes is like, how they have managed to survive the shortages. What has struck me during the many trips that I've made to Cuba in the last two years is that the blockade has created in Cuba a kind of "culture of necessity," a social situation in which people have to get along without certain things. The aspect that really interests me is how the blockade has contributed to changing the mentality of the people. We have a clash between an anti-consumer society and the most consumption-oriented society in the world. The book is now at a stage where after thinking that it would be just an

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easy, fairly short piece of journalism, it is now turning into a very long and complicated book. But that doesn't really matter because all of my books have been like that. And besides, the book will prove with historical facts that the real world in the Caribbean is just as fantastic as in the stories of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any long-range ambitions or regrets as a writer?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I think my answer is the same as the one I gave you about fame. I was asked the other day if I would be interested in the Nobel Prize, but I think that for me it would be an absolute catastrophe. I would certainly be interested in deserving it, but to receive it would be terrible. It would just complicate even more the problems of fame. The only thing I really regret in life is not having a daughter.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any projects now underway you can discuss?

GARCIA MARQUEZ

I'm absolutely convinced that I'm going to write the greatest book of my life, but I don't know which one it will be or when. When I feel something like this—which I have been feeling now for awhile—I stay very quiet so that if it passes by I can capture it.

—Peter H. Stone

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Feuilletons from *A Certain Lucas*

Julio Cortázar
translated by Gregory Rabassa

I. Orchestre Macabre

Kitten on the Keys

A cat had been taught to play the piano and this animal, sitting on a stool, played and played the whole existent piano repertory, and in addition five compositions of its own dedicated to several dogs.

Otherwise, the cat was possessed of a perfect stupidity, and during concert intermissions he would compose new pieces with a drive that left everyone flabbergasted. In that way he reached opus eighty-nine, during which he was the victim of a brick thrown by someone with a tenacious rage. He sleeps his final sleep in the lobby of the Great Rex Theater, 640 Corrientes.

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Natural harmony or You Can't Keep on Violating It

A child had thirteen fingers on each hand and his aunts immediately put him to playing the harp, something that made good use of the extras and he completed the course in half the time needed by poor pentadigitates.

After that the child came to play in such a way that there was no score worthy of him. When he began to give concerts, the amount of music that he concentrated in that time and space with his twenty-six fingers was so extraordinary that the audience couldn't keep up and was always behind, so that when the young *artisto* was coming to the end of *The Fountain of Arethusa* (a transcription) the poor people were still in the *Tambourin Chinois* (an arrangement). This naturally created horrible confusions, but everyone recognized that the child played like an angel.

So it came to pass that the faithful listeners, the same as box-seat subscribers and newspaper critics, continued going to the child's concerts, earnestly trying not to be left behind as the program went on. They listened so hard that several of them began to grow ears on their faces, and with every new ear that grew on them they got a little closer to the music of the twenty-six fingers on the harp. The trouble came when the Wagnerian concert let out and people on the street fainted by the dozen as they saw listeners appear with their whole visages covered by ears, and then the Municipal Superintendent took drastic steps and put the child in the typing pool at Internal Revenue, where he worked so fast that it was pleasure for his bosses and death for his co-workers. As for music, in a dark corner of the parlor, forgotten by its owner perhaps, silent and covered with dust, the harp could be seen.

Customs of the Symphony Orchestra Called "Fly"

The musical director of the "Fly" Symphony, Maestro

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Tabaré Piscitelli, was the author of the orchestra's motto: "Creation within freedom." To that end he authorized the use of open collars, anarchism, Benzedrine, and personally set a high example of independence. Hadn't he been observed in the middle of a Mahler symphony to turn the baton over to one of the violinists (who got the fright of his life) and go off to read *La Razón* in an empty seat?

•

The cellists of the "Fly" Symphony loved the harpist, the widow Pérez Sangiácomo, en bloc. This love was translated into a noteworthy tendency to break the order of the orchestra and surround the bewildered performer with a sort of screen of cellists, as her hands stood out like signals for help throughout the whole program. Furthermore, not once did a subscriber to the concerts hear a single arpeggio from the harp because the steady buzz of the cellos covered up its delicate effusions.

Threatened by the Board of Directors, Mrs. Pérez Sangiácomo showed a preference in her heart for the cellist Remo Persutti, who was authorized to keep his instrument beside the harp, while the others returned, a sad procession of scarabs, to the place tradition assigns their pensive carapaces.

•

In this orchestra one of the bassoonists couldn't play his instrument without the strange phenomenon of his being sucked in and immediately expelled out the other end, with such rapidity that the stupefied musician found himself suddenly on the other end of the bassoon and had to turn around with great speed and go on playing, not without the conductor's castigating him with horrendous personal slurs.

One night, when they were playing the *Doll Symphony*, by Albert Williams, the bassoonist, in an attack of absorption, found himself suddenly at the other end of the instrument, with the serious inconvenience this time that said point in space was occupied by the clarinetist Perkins Virasoro, who, as a result of the collision, was flung on top of the double basses and

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arose, markedly furious and pronouncing words that no one has ever heard from the mouth of a doll; such at least was the opinion of the lady subscribers and of the fireman on duty in the hall, the father of several little ones.

•

The cellist Remo Persutti having been absent, the personnel of those strings moved as a group over beside the harpist, the widow Pérez Sangiácomo, from where they didn't move for the whole evening. The theater staff laid down a rug and put potted ferns on it to fill the obvious gap that this produced.

•

The kettledrummer, Alcides Radaelli, took advantage of the tone poems of Richard Strauss to send messages in Morse code to his sweetheart seated in the loges, left eight.

An army telegrapher present at the concert because of the cancellation of the boxing matches in Luna Park due to a death in the family of one of the fighters, deciphered with great wonderment the following phrase that poured forth halfway through *Also Sprach Zarathustra*: "Are your hives better, Cuca?"

Quintessences

The tenor Américo Scravellini, of the cast at the Marconi Theater, sang so sweetly that his fans called him "the angel."

So no one was too startled when in the middle of a concert they saw four handsome seraphim descend through the air and with an ineffable whisper of gold and scarlet accompany the voice of the great singer. If one part of the audience showed understandable signs of surprise, the rest, enthralled by the vocal perfection of tenor Scravellini, accepted the presence of the angels as an almost necessary miracle, or rather, as if it weren't a miracle at all. The singer himself, given over to his effusion, limited himself to lifting his eyes toward the angels

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and he kept on singing with that indefinable half tone that had made him famous in the whole chain of theaters.

Softly, the angels surrounded him, and holding him with infinite tenderness and ever so gently, they rose up above the stage while the audience trembled with emotion and wonder, and the singer continued on with his melody that became all the more ethereal in the air.

In that way the angels took him away from his public, who finally understood that the tenor Scravellini was not of this world. The celestial group reached the highest point of the theater; the singer's voice was becoming more and more otherworldly. When the final and absolutely perfect note of the aria came out of his throat, the angels dropped him.

II. Sunset Hunter

If I were a moviemaker I'd set about hunting sunsets. I've got it all figured out except for the capital needed for the safari, because a sunset doesn't let itself be caught just like that, I mean that sometimes it starts out as a silly little thing and just when you abandon it, all of its feathers come out, or, just the opposite, it's a chromatic extravaganza and suddenly you're left with a kind of soaped-up parrot, and in both cases you have to count on a camera with good color film, travel expenses and an itinerary of overnight stops, keeping watch on the sky, and the choice of the most propitious horizon, none of it cheap. In any case, I think that if I were a moviemaker I would set things up to hunt sunsets, just one sunset actually, but in order to arrive at the definitive sunset I'd have to film forty or fifty, because if I were a moviemaker I'd be just as demanding as with words, women, and geopoliticians.

That's not how it is and I console myself by imagining that the sunset has been caught already, sleeping in its long canned

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spiral. My plan: not just the hunting but the restitution of the sunset to my fellows who don't know much about them, I mean city people who watch the sun go down, if they happen to see it, behind the post office, the apartment buildings across the way, or on a sub-horizon of television antennas and lamp-posts. The movie would be silent, or with a soundtrack that would only record the sounds contemporary to the filmed sunset, probably some barking dog or the buzzing of horseflies, with luck the little bell of a sheep or the breaking of a wave if it's a maritime sunset.

Through experience and a wristwatch I know that a good sunset doesn't last more than twenty minutes between climax and anticlimax, two things I would eliminate in order to leave only its slow internal play, its kaleidoscope of imperceptible mutations; it would be one of those films they call documentaries, shown before Brigitte Bardot while people are settling down and looking at the screen as if they were on a bus or a subway. My film would have a printed explanation (maybe a voice off screen) along these lines: "What you are about to see is the sunset of June 7, 1976, filmed in X with M film and fixed camera, without interruption for Z minutes." The audience will be informed that outside of the sunset absolutely nothing happens, for which reason they are advised to go about as if they were at home and to do whatever they feel like doing, looking at the sunset, for example, turning their backs on it, talking to others, strolling about, etc. We're terribly sorry that we can't suggest that they smoke, something that's always so beautiful at sunset, but the medieval conditions of movie theaters require that they be aware of the prohibition of that excellent habit. On the other hand, it's not forbidden to take a good swig from the pocket flask that the distributor of the film sells in the lobby.

It's impossible to predict the fate of my film; people go to the movies to forget about themselves, and a sunset leans exactly in the opposite direction, it's the moment when, perhaps, we see ourselves a little more naked, that happens to me, in any case, and it's painful and useful; maybe others can make use of it too, you never know.

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III. Lucas × 7

Lucas, His Battles With The Hydra

Now that he's growing old he realizes that it's not easy to kill it.

It's easy being a hydra but killing it isn't, because if it's really necessary to kill the hydra by cutting off its several heads (between seven and nine according to authors or bestiaries worthy of consultation), at least one has to be left, because the hydra is Lucas himself and what he'd like to do is get out of the hydra but stay in Lucas, to pass from the poly- to the monocephalic. I'd like to see you do it, says Lucas, envying Heracles, who never had such problems with the hydra and who after giving it one clean swipe left it looking like a gaudy fountain with seven or nine jets of blood spouting out of it. It's one thing to kill the hydra and something else again to be that hydra who at one time had been only Lucas and who would like to go back to being him. For example, you take a cut on the head that collects records, and you take another on the one that invariably lays his pipe down on the left-hand side of the desk and the glass with the felt markers on the right and a little to the rear. Now it's time to consider the results.

Hmm, something's been gained, two heads less but the remaining ones in a bit of a crisis as they agitatedly think and think as they face the mournful fact. Or: for a while at least there is a halt in the obsessiveness of that urgent need to complete the series of madrigals by Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa (Lucas is missing two records in the series, it seems that they're out of print and won't be re-pressed, and that damages the presence of the other records. Let the head that thinks and wants and gnaws like that die from a clean cut). Furthermore, it's distressingly novel to reach for the pipe and find that it's not in its place. Let's take advantage of this will for disorder and right here slice off the head that likes being closed in, the easy chair for reading beside the lamp, the Scotch at six-thirty with two cubes and not much soda, the books and magazines piled up in order of priority.

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But it's quite difficult to kill the hydra and get back to Lucas, he can feel it already in the midst of the bloody battle. To begin with, he's describing it on a sheet of paper that he took out of the second drawer on the right-hand side of the desk, when actually there's paper in sight all over the place, but no sir, that's the ritual and let's not mention the Italian extension lamp four positions a hundred watts placed like a crane over a construction site and most delicately balanced so that the beam of light etc. A flashing slice at that seated Egyptian scribe head. One less, oof. Lucas is getting closer to himself, it's starting to look good.

He'll never get to know how many heads he has left to cut off because the phone rings and it's Claudine, who talks about ruuuuunning to the movie theater where they're showing a Woody Allen picture. Evidently Lucas hasn't cut the heads off in the proper ontological order, because his first reaction is no, no way, Claudine is boiling like a crab on the other end, Woody Allen Woody Allen, and Lucas baby, don't push me if you want to win me over, you think I can come down out of this fight that's gushing plasma and Rh factor just because you feel Woody Woody, you've got to understand that there are values and there are values. When from the other end Annapurna is dropped in the form of a receiver onto the cradle, Lucas understands that it would have been better if first he'd killed the head that orders, respects, and hierarchizes time, maybe in that way everything would have softened suddenly and then pipe Claudine markers Gesualdo in different sequences, and Woody Allen, of course. Now it's too late, no Claudine now, not even any words now to go on telling about the battle since there isn't any battle, what head should he cut off since there'll always be another more authoritarian one left, it's time to answer the correspondence that's piling up, in ten minutes the Scotch with its ice and a touch of soda, it's so clear that they've started to grow on him again, that cutting them off was of no use. In the bathroom mirror Lucas can see the complete hydra and its faces with bright smiles, all the teeth showing. Seven heads, one for each decade; worse yet, the suspicion that two more may grow on him in conformity with what certain author-

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ities in hydric matters say, as long as he keeps his health, of course.

Lucas, His Patriotism

i

In my passport I like the pages with renewals and visa stamps round/triangular/green/square/black/oval/red; in my image of Buenos Aires the ferry across the Riachuelo, the Plaza Irlanda, the Agronomy Gardens, a few cafés that might not be there anymore, a bed in an apartment on Maipú just off the corner of Córdoba, the smell and silence of the docks at midnight in summer, the trees on the Plaza Lavalle.

Of my country what I have left is a smell of Mendoza irrigation ditches, the poplars in Uspallata, the deep purple of Velasco Hill in La Rioja, the Chaco stars in Pampa de Guanacos going from Salta to Misiones on a train in the year forty-two, a horse I rode in Saladillo, the taste of Cinzano and Gordon's gin in the Boston on Florida, the slightly allergic smell of the orchestra seats in the Colón, the deluxe bus from Luna Park with Carlos Beulchi and Mario Díaz, some dairy stores at dawn, the ugliness of the Plaza Once, reading *Sur* in my sweetly ingenuous years, the fifty cent editions of *Claridad* with Roberto Arlt and Castelnuovo, and also a few courtyards, of course, and shadows that I keep quiet, and dead people.

Lucas, His Patriotism

ii

In the center of the image are probably the geraniums, but there are also wisteria, summer, *mate* at five-thirty, the sewing machine, slippers, and slow conversations about illnesses and family annoyances, a chicken suddenly leaving its calling card between two chairs or the cat after a dove that's way ahead of him. Everything that smells of clothes drying on the line, starch, bluing, and bleach, smells of jubilation, of biscuits or fritters, almost always the radio next door with tangos and ads for Geniol, for Cocinero cooking fat the one you should be looking at, and kids kicking a rag ball around the vacant lot out back, Beto made the aerial goal.

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Everything so conventional, so pleasant that Lucas out of pure shame looks for other ways out, halfway through the memory he decides to remember how at that hour he would shut himself up to read Homer and Dickson Carr, loafing in his little room so as not to hear about Aunt Papa's appendicitis operation again with all the mournful details and the living representation of the horrible nausea brought on by the anesthesia, or the story of the mortgage of the house on the Calle Bulnes where Uncle Alejandro was sinking from *mate* to *mate* until the apotheosis of collective sighs and everything is going from bad to worse. Josefina, what we need here is a strong government, goddamn it. Flora luckily there to show the photo of Clark Gable in the rotogravure of *La Prensa* and remurmur the starring moments of *Gone With the Wind*. Sometimes Grandmother would remember Francesca Bertini and Uncle Alejandro could see Barbara La Marr, barbarity unmarred, you and your vamps, you men are all alike, Lucas understands that there's nothing he can do, that he's in the patio again, that the postcard is still stuck forever in the frame of the mirror of time, hand painted, with its fringe of doves, with its thin black border.

Lucas, His Modesty

In today's apartments, as is well known, the guest goes to the bathroom and the others keep on talking about Biafra and Michel Foucault, but there is something in the air as if everybody wanted to forget that he has hearing and at the same time ears are attuned toward the sacred place that in our huddled society is, naturally, scarcely ten feet away from the place where those high-level conversations are taking place, and it is certain that in spite of all efforts the absent guest will make not to reveal his activities and those of his fellows to raise the volume of the dialogue, at some moment there will reverberate one of those dull sounds that let themselves be heard under the least indicated circumstances, or, in the best of cases, the pathetic tearing of cheap toilet paper as a piece is ripped off the pink or green roll.

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If the guest who has gone to the bathroom is Lucas, his horror can only be compared to the intensity of the colic that has obliged him to shut himself up in the ominous redoubt. In that horror there is neither neurosis nor any complex, but the certainty of a recurrent intestinal behavior, that is to say, everything will start off fine, softly and silently, but then toward the end, keeping the same relationship between powder and partridge in a hunting cartridge, a rather horrendous detonation will shake the toothbrushes in their racks and agitate the plastic shower curtain.

Lucas can do nothing to avoid it; he had tried all methods, such as leaning over to touch the floor with his head, leaning backwards to the point where his feet brush against the wall opposite, turning sidewise and, as an extreme measure, grasping his buttocks and separating them as much as possible so as to increase the diameter of the tempestuous conduit. Vain is the addition of such silencing devices as placing about his thighs all the towels within reach and even his hosts' bathrobes; practically always, at the end of what could have been an agreeable transfer, the final fart bursts forth tumultuously.

When it is someone else's turn to go to the bathroom, Lucas trembles for him, for he is certain that at any second the first yoicks of ignominy will resound; it surprises him a little that people don't seem to worry too much about things like that, although it's obvious that they're not unaware of what's going on and even cover it up with the noise of spoons in cups and the totally unnecessary movement of armchairs. When nothing happens, Lucas is happy and immediately asks for another cognac, by which he gives himself away so that everybody realizes he had been tense and anxious while Mrs. Broggi took care of her necessities. How different, Lucas thinks, from the simplicity of children who come into the most elegant of gatherings and announce: Mama, I have to make poochy. How happy, Lucas continues thinking, is that anonymous poet who composed the quatrain that proclaims that there is no pleasure so exquisite/as that derived from a good, slow shit,/nor pleasure as delicate as that/which comes on after one has shat. In order to rise to that gentleman's heights, one would have to be exempt from all danger of intemperate or tempestuous windi-

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ness, unless the bathroom in the house were upstairs or was one of those little tin-roofed privies separated from the ranch house by a goodly distance.

Having entered poetic territory now, Lucas remembers the line from Dante where each devil *avea del cul fatto trombetta*, and with that mental reference to highest culture he considers himself somewhat blameless for meditations that have little to do with what Dr. Berenstein is saying with regard to housing laws.

Lucas, His Ecological Meditations

In these times of a disheveled and touristy return to Nature, in which city people view country life the way Rousseau viewed the noble savage, I join ranks more than ever with: a) Max Jacob, who in reply to an invitation to spend a weekend in the country, said, somewhere between stupefaction and terror: "The country? That place where chickens run around raw?"; b) Dr. Johnson, who halfway through an outing in Greenwich Park energetically expressed his preference for Fleet Street; c) Baudelaire, who elevated love for the artificial to the notion of paradise itself.

A landscape, a stroll through the woods, a dousing in a waterfall, a road between two cliffs can only raise us up to aesthetic heights if we have the assurance of a return home or to the hotel, the lustral shower, dinner and wine, the talk over coffee and dessert, a book or some papers, the eroticism that sums everything up and starts it up again. I don't trust admirers of nature who every so often get out of the car to look at the view and take five or six leaps up onto the rocks; as for the others, those lifetime Boy Scouts who are accustomed to wandering about covered by enormous knapsacks and wild beards, their reactions are mostly monosyllabic or exclamatory; everything seems to consist of standing time and time again looking at a hill or a sunset, which are the most repeated things imaginable.

Civilized people are lying when they fall into bucolic rapture; if they miss their Scotch on the rocks at seven-thirty in the evening, they'll curse the minute they left home to come and

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endure gadflies, sunburn, and thorns; as for those closest to nature, they're as stupid as she is; a book, a play, a sonata don't need any return or shower; that's where we reach the greatest heights, where we are the most we can be. What the intellectual or the artist who takes refuge in the countryside is looking for is tranquility, fresh lettuce, and oxygenated air; with nature surrounding him on all sides, he reads or paints in the perfect light of a well-oriented room; if he goes out for a walk or goes to the window to look at the animals or the clouds, it's because he's tired with his work or with his ease. Don't trust, then, the absorbed contemplation of a tulip when the contemplator is an intellectual. What's there is tulip + distraction, or tulip + meditation (almost never about the tulip). He will never find a natural scene that can take more than five minutes of determined contemplation, and, on the other hand, he will feel all time abolished in the reading of Theocritus or Keats, especially in the passages where scenes of nature appear. Yes, Max Jacob was right: chickens should be cooked.

Lucas, His Spanish Classes

At Berlitz, where they took him on half out of pity, the director, who is from Astorga, warns him against any Argentinisms, not to mention Gallicisms, we teach it proper here, bloody proper, and the first *che* I catch you with means you can hop it. What you will do is teach them to speak in a normal way and none of your fancy frills, because what these Frenchmen are coming here to learn is not to make asses out of themselves at the border or in restaurants. Proper and practical, get that into what we might call your noggin.

Lucas, perplexed, immediately tries to find some texts that would respond to such an illustrious criterion, and when he begins his class in front of a dozen Parisians avid for an *olé* and an I should like an omelet with six eggs, he passes out some photocopies he has made of a passage from an article in *El País*, September 17, 1978, note how modern and how, by his lights, it should be the quintessence of the proper and the practical since it deals with bullfighting and all the Frenchmen are

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thinking about is rushing off to a bullring as soon as they have their diplomas in their pockets, one reason why this vocabulary will be exceedingly useful at the moment of the first of the three stages, the banderillas, and all the rest. The text reads as follows, to wit:

The galache, *magnificent, medium-sized, but with spirit, quite well-armed with tapering horns, improved by breeding, for he was noble, was following the flight of the muleta that the master from Salamanca manipulated with ease and control. Relaxed in his posture, he strung together his passes with the muleta, and each one was a piece of absolute mastery, making the bull follow a semicircle about him to the right, and the conclusion, clean and precise, leaving the beast at just the right distance. There were incomparable naturals and tremendous chest passes, and the help of two-handed ups and downs, and sign-off passes, but engraved in our eyes is a natural coupled to a chest pass and the pattern of the last, ending up at the opposite shoulder, must figure among the best muleta work ever done by El Viti.*

As is natural, the students immediately fall upon their dictionaries to translate the passage, a task that after three minutes is followed by a growing distress, an exchange of dictionaries, a rubbing of eyes, and questions for Lucas, which he won't answer at all because he has decided to apply the self-teaching method and in those cases the teacher should gaze out the window while the exercises are being done. When the director appears to inspect Lucas's performance, everyone has left after letting it be known in French what they think of Spanish and especially of dictionaries that have cost them their good francs. The only one remaining is an erudite-looking young man who is asking Lucas if the reference to the "master from Salamanca" could be an allusion to Fray Luis de León, to which Lucas replies that it might well be, although the surest answer is, who knows. The director waits for the student to leave and tells Lucas that there's no need to start with classical poetry, of course Fray Luis and all that, but try to find something simpler, let's say something bloody typical like a visit by tourists to a restaurant or a bullring, you'll soon see how they'll get interested and learn overnight.

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Lucas, His Long Marches

Everybody knows that the Earth is separated from other heavenly bodies by a variable number of light-years. What few know (in reality, only I) is that Margarita is separated from me by a considerable number of snail-years.

At first I thought it was a matter of tortoise-years, but I've had to abandon that unit of measurement as too flattering. Little as a tortoise may travel, I would have ended up reaching Margarita, but, on the other hand, Osvaldo, my favorite snail, doesn't leave me the slightest hope. Who knows when he started the march that was imperceptibly taking him farther away from my left shoe, even though I had oriented him with extreme precision in the direction that would lead him to Margarita. Full of fresh lettuce, care, and lovingly attended, his first advance was promising, and I said to myself hopefully that before the patio pine passed beyond the height of the roof, Osvaldo's silver-plated horns would enter Margarita's field of vision to bring her my friendly message; in the meantime, from here I could be happy imagining her joy on seeing him arrive, the waving of her braids and arms.

All light-years may be equal, but not so snail-years, and Osvaldo has ceased to merit my trust. It isn't that he's stopped, since it's possible for me to verify by his silvery trail that he's continuing his march and that he's maintaining the right direction, although this presupposes his going up and down countless walls or passing completely through a noodle factory. But it's been more difficult for me to check that meritorious exactness, and twice I've been stopped by furious watchmen to whom I've had to tell the worst lies since the truth would have brought me a rain of whacks. The sad part is that Margarita, sitting in a pink velvet easy chair, is waiting for me on the other side of the city. If instead of Osvaldo I had made use of light-years, we probably would already have had grandchildren; but when one loves long and softly, when one wants to come to the end of a drawn-out wait, it's logical that snail-years should be chosen. It's so hard, after all, to decide on what the advantages and what the disadvantages of these options are.

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Portfolio

Dreams

Jonathan Borofsky

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I dreamed I could fly

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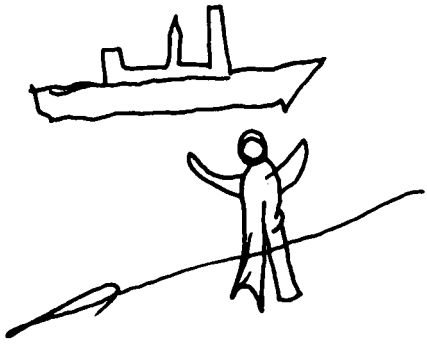
I dreamed I was leaving
on a trip but I forgot my money



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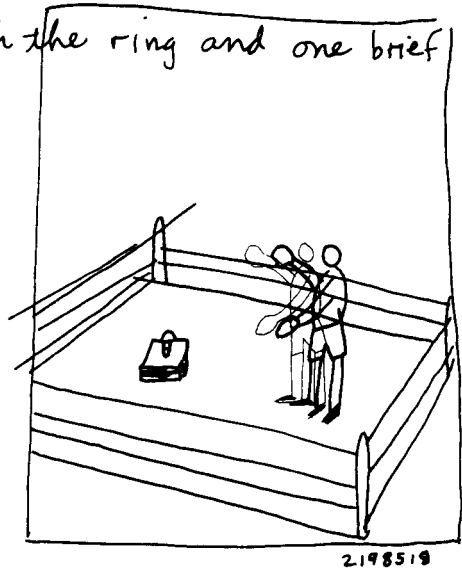
I dreamed there was one fighter in the ring and one brief case.



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I dreamed that some Hitler-type person was not allowing everyone to roller-skate in public places. I decided to assasinate him, but I was informed by my friend that Hitler had been dead a long time and if I wanted to change anything, I should go into politics. This seemed like a good idea since I was tired of making art and was wondering what to do with the last half of my life

2454568

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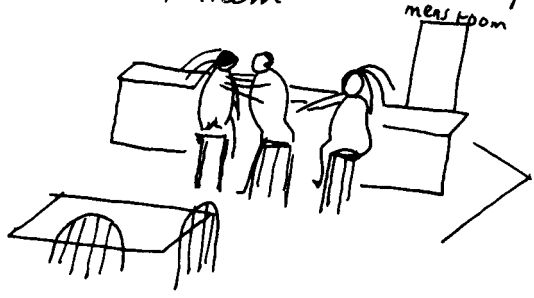
I dreamed that I made out with two different girls in a bar, but I left before anything could develop with either of them



2469105

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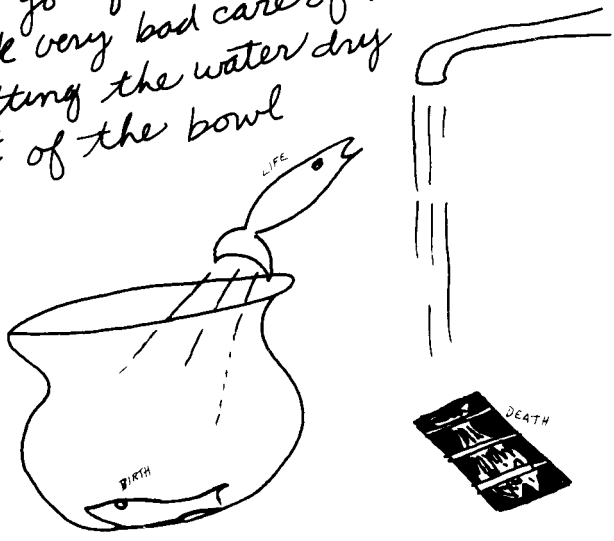
I dreamed that I had two goldfish that I continually took very bad care of including letting the water dry out of the bowl



Once, while both of the fish were stuck to the bottom of a dry bowl, I took them to the sink for cool fresh water — one jumped out and partially down the drain for need of water. The other was having trouble reviving when I woke up. 2473098

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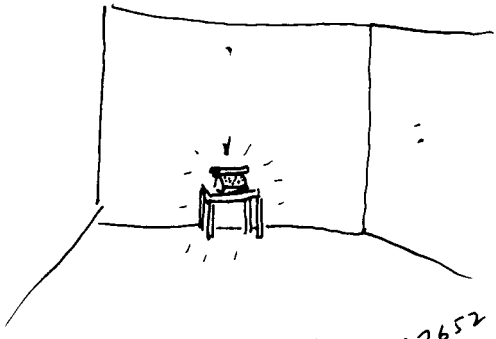
I dreamed that
my new studio
was robbed and
that the 3 paintings
I had worked on so long
were stolen. The
typewriter was left,
though, which made
me think they
might try again



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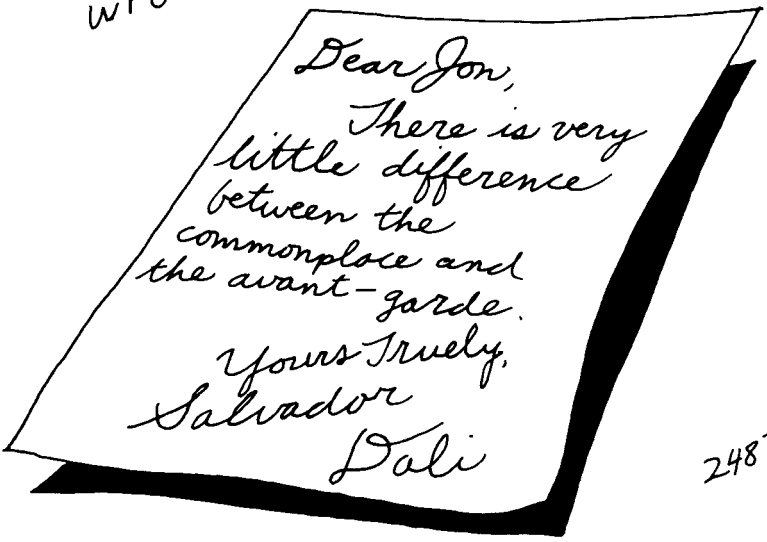
I dreamed that Salvador Dali wrote me a letter.



2487690

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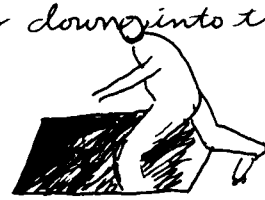
I dreamed I was being followed. I stepped down into a hole in the ground and started to work my way down into the earth.



I realized that if I was going to make it, I would need some help.

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I dreamed I saw a group of modern airoplanes flying around the globe in very tight formation.

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ESCAPE

I dreamed I was being chased by another man who had a gun. Actually we were both flying, (just our bodies), first outside and then around the inside of a large empty cubic space

I half yelled in my sleep and decided that next time I would really yell. Then Megan woke me by asking if I was okay.

2533/66

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I dreamed that a man
in a tower was being shot at.

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Was That The Moon?

R. D. Pohl

Was that the moon? None of my business. And anyway I'm myopic. Third grade. I remember. Things growing dim. Chalk lines fading like runic characters. The fluorescence. My classmates' faces glowing, indistinguishable. My chronic squinting mistaken for epistemological skepticism. David Hume and I. The headaches.

You might think the situation correctable. Prescription lenses. Years of association with Buddy Holly. "Horn-rim frames are here to stay." Six years later, contacts.

Depleted savings account. Social adjustments. New possibilities afforded, though. A boon to romance. Could be induced to pop out at intimate moments. Heavy petting, for instance. "Excuse me, I seem to have lost something." The Joy of the Search.

I'm against them now. Against the idea of correction. Plexiglass hatches on the portals of the soul. Very dangerous idea. Are there defects in nature? Who corrects them? The Army Corps of Engineers. Totalitarian logic, don't you think? "This

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is the way the river *should* run." "You *ought* to be able to read the bottom line."

After all, to admit that I might see things better with lenses is to imply that I don't see them rightly now. I say, "dark patch, blurred." You say, "approaching locomotive." Each of us makes an appropriate ontological and esthetic judgement. No room here for imperatives.

Not speaking merely for myself here. Speaking for all the nearsighted. Their persecution. At home. School. The workplace. "You *must* see an eye specialist." Optometrist in white lab coat seats you in enormous jaw-hinged chair. Admonishes to "make yourself comfortable" sardonically. Dim lights in room. Brandishes flashlight.

Enough! I am opposed to graphic description. Obvious reasons. The tyranny of the camera. The knowledge of Tiresias. That's one reason why the contacts had to go. The fallacy of Perfect Vision.

Other reasons more banal. Like pain, ineptitude, my aversion to mirrors. Perhaps these all can be reduced to a single grievance. The so-called "Laws of Optics." Irrevocable and unfair. Anthropomorphic too, at least what I understand of them. Why should anyone claim to know something just because they've seen it happen? Alright, so the moon passes before the sun and there is darkness. What does it mean?

Of course, there is media coverage. Newswire services and television networks. Barbara Walters interviewing famous astronomer. Astronomer shows Walters his bathroom, decorously appointed with sign-of-the-Zodiac fixtures. Again the lights are dimmed, and Walters blinks in astonishment as bathroom's dome-shaped ceiling takes on the aspect of heavens. Astronomer explains that bathroom doubles as a private planetarium. Proceeds to demonstrate "what happens during an eclipse."

The explanation is better than the real thing. It's better packaged. It has a more attractive logo. There are distractions, which add a kind of subliminal tension. And time left for an editorial comment. Something about the futility of man "before the endless wonders of the universe." Then a panty-

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hose commercial.

In principle, however, the phenomenon is no more complicated than closing the closet door. From the viewpoint of optics, anyhow. Which sort of makes you wonder about those laws of optics. Why can't they explain Barbara Walters?

There is so little we really know about Barbara Walters. Why has the scientific community ignored her for so long? Is she also myopic? What is her cranial size? Does she have any gross deformities? These are the real questions people want answered. Not about the moons of Saturn.

My own suspicion is that she is myopic. That like me, she has shattered her lenses and accepted the distortions of the world. With great success. And influence. I've always associated her with Dante's Beatrice. But then, I sit too close to the screen.

Which curiously enough, is often cited as a contributing factor to myopia. Sitting too close to the screen, that is. Sort of an occupational hazard. I suppose. If you get too close to anything, you're going to lose track of everything. The unwritten law of optics. Merciless.

I discovered this unassailable principle while on the job, so to speak. Amid tourists. Under the Falls. Niagara. Leading, again, so to speak, the Tour. Not really a job at all. More a divertissement for a buck. Which is what the tour cost. I made a dime a head. Children under twelve free. No problem with that. Someone had to ask questions.

When I was younger, I took to it seriously. Studied the *History of the Niagara Region*. Made geological notes. Considered myself an authority. No use. Tour had no entertainment value. I mumbled and was flat-footed. Disgusted the honeymooners with my squinting. And finally, wasn't all that helpful. Couldn't really see through the mist.

To Niagara alone I remained faithful. The Lonely Life of the Tour Guide. My mistress, Niagara, bound in ice, locked in light. That is the way I thought of her, anyway. Something Oedipal in all that. Her. Why then is she called "father of waters?" Never the same river twice says the guide, says the bride. "I mean never the same waters." The Falls. The froth. The premature ejaculation of the sweatborne Northeast,

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falling from steely rapids into a gorgeous gorge. White foam. Thunder. Then afterwards, gulls. Gently circling gulls.

Enough! I am opposed to graphic description. A bit self-indulgent back there. I suppose. There's a way in which love is like vision. With respect to the thing unseen. The gender of Niagara? Perhaps sex is more variable than I had imagined. Whatever that says for my imagination.

(S)he and I. The implausibility of metaphysical relations. Being there. Not being there. The abyss. Did I seek to protect her? What sort of protection? Did I seek to mislead? What of the frequent stops near concessionaires? The more frequent stops near restrooms. Two million gallons falling per second. Hydroelectric. The Power of Suggestion.

Finally, driven by the turbined soul, I bluffed idle hands from the table. She. Her nature hidden. The invisible Niagara. The transparent cataract. One afternoon I suggested that, "according to the metaphysical system developed by Irish philosopher George Berkeley (b.1685—d.1753), Niagara Falls exists only as an idea in the mind of tourists." Next morning, I had the following retraction published in the *Niagara Falls Gazette*:

> Although philosophy is generally outside the province of the tour guide, let me simply point out that Berkeley's immaterialism contends nothing to diminish the Splendor That Is Niagara. Berkeley maintains only that *esse* is *percipi*—that things can be accorded no greater existence than is grounded in our perceptions, and grossly speaking—in our ideas of them. Properly understood, Berkeley would no more deny the material existence of Niagara Falls than he would that of the Grand Canyon or Mount Rushmore.

The retraction was widely quoted but ignored. Attendance on the tour skyrocketed. "See the Falls with a nearsighted Skeptic," read the ads. "Tell others what you *think* you've seen." But all the while the white waters silent.

Out of desperation, I propounded the stunt. Wore leotards.

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Offered oblations to the moon. Joking. Ignored the silence. Sought to demonstrate that, appearances notwithstanding, Niagara could not even flow, let alone fall:

> Either a river flows in the place where it is, or the place where it is not. It cannot flow in the place where it is, nor can it possibly flow in a place it is not. Therefore, it cannot flow. . . .

The Niagara Falls as Illusion theme was less well received. Sold fewer postcards. The Chamber of Commerce called it "the straw that broke the camel's back," and demanded my replacement. "We must be mindful," their censure read,

> that without the Falls, we would be just another industrial monolith twenty miles north of Buffalo. The tour guide's cryptic remark about the camel's back "already being sore from humping" does little to endear him to the citizens of this, the Honeymoon Capital of the World.

I resigned. Went on public assistance. Now and again, would visit Niagara. She, cold and distant, refused to show herself to me. Even when, on the sly, I slipped on a pair of glasses.

Spent most of my time in front of the television. Barbara Walters. Reruns of "Not for Women Only." Sat close to the screen. Lit up my evenings. Or was that the moon?

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How to Write a Poem

Gordon Lish

I tell you, I am no more interested in poetry than the next fellow is. I mean, I can take it or leave it. On the other hand, once in a blue moon I come across a poem whose unfolding holds me for the distance. Not that it must be a very good poem, in mine or in someone else's opinion. On the contrary, my enthusiasm is entirely a function of my hoping to detect a key insufficiency in a poem of no particular merit, of my intuiting a certain turning where the poet's nerve—forget intelligence—failed him.

What I generally do in a case of this kind is rewrite the poem and then pass it off as my own. Not that anyone is ever the wiser, except perhaps the poet himself should it improbably happen that he discover my revision of his work. To begin with, poets don't read much poetry. But more in my favor still, a stink would result in one's appearing to lay claim to an excess one dared not show the courage to commit.

I have in mind a poem of rather contemporary vintage in

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which the poet tells of a day passed with the widow of a man with whom the poet had conducted a liaison of some duration.

An adulterous love affair, of course.

Now, the poet is herself married. Her spouse does or does not know of the poet's illicit relation to the dead man. The same goes for the dead man's wife. What I mean is—and what is meant by the poet in the poem—it is of no great importance whether or not these spouses were actually alert to the connection between the dead man and the poet. Please see that I am talking about foreknowledge—for in the course of the poem the widow finds out, whereas in the instance of the surviving husband (the one party who does not count very much), the cat's out of the bag when the poem is written.

All right, let's say published, then.

It doesn't really count one way or the other, the husband, what he knows or doesn't.

What happens is this. The poet and the widow are spending the day together at the widow's sorting out the dead man's letters, papers, journals, etc. They are being women together, friends, etc. Grieving lightly, making neat, drinking tea, pausing every so often to consider this and that, recite a choice passage, now and then weep.

Order, memory, fellowship.

Nice.

When—you guessed it—there's the wife, the widow, plucking from a carton a packet the dead man made of the poet's letters of devotion.

Etc., etc., etc.

My God.

But it isn't so bad as all that. After all, the man's dead, the widow's seen plenty, the poet's a poet, life is life.

So there we are, the two women crying and crying and then laughing and laughing—until the next thing we know, they're embracing.

Naturally, there is no direct speech in the poem. But for purposes of drama and character, let's imagine the widow says,

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"All these years, the real man was the man you addressed in these letters," and the poet says whatever you say to someone who is being rueful at the expense of his own worth. "No, no, no, I always envied you for having the best of him, his true substance, what the man really was in real life." Etc.

The dead man, in pursuit of this argument, is now celebrated, in four deft lines of spacious intent, for his performance in the roles of husband, father, householder, provider. Disingenuously perhaps—perhaps merely for the sake of the wounded widow—but who cares?

It is not crucial. For we know that in all these burdensome capacities we are also hearing from the poet an expression of the dead man's quality as a lover.

What I'm saying is, so far the poem keeps things in balance.

But what is crucial is this. There they are, the two women, poet and widow, usurper and usurped, in the instant unclothed, as it were—and, like all people made nervous by nakedness, anxious to seize the handiest covering.

So they straightaway hide their embarrassment in each other's flesh, graduating from an embrace fashioned out of sentimentality to one of furious carnality, at which point the poem has furnished us with roughly three-quarters of its text, the day having accomplished, by this time, a like progress. Meaning, it is dusk when the two women drift off to the same bed, the poet thereafter projecting her astral body back to the room where the letters and papers and journals lie partially sorted on the widow's Chinese rug amid an exhibition of teacups, saucers, various articles of record-keeping, the poet's purse, two pairs of shoes, and so forth.

As for the rest of the poem, it now labors to extract from the figure of these particulars a facsimile of the human spectacle past, present, and future, something serviceable in the way of what events must be presumed to mean.

So this was the poem the poet published and that I—given my gift for locating the precise moment when the work turns away from the fearful prospect in it—have since rewritten and

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printed under my own signature.

In my poem, everything is the same through to the time when the two women retire from the room. And like my predecessor, I also return to the earlier setting to view the artifacts produced by the actions that prepared the way for an empty room, doing so, as did the inferior poet, by reason of my astral body's power to get where it wants to.

I see it all.

Everything is as it was in the original poem—teacups, saucers, shoes, etc. But they repose instead on a decent-grade, moderately-priced, plain beige span of well-vacuumed wall-to-wall carpet.

You see what artistic courage is? Not to mention a certain genius for braving life.

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Rainer Maria Rilke
translated by Stephen Mitchell

Requiem for a Friend

(In memoriam Paula Modersohn-Becker)

I have my dead, and I have let them go,
and was amazed to see them so contented,
so soon at home in being dead, so cheerful,
so unlike their reputation. Only you
return; brush past me, loiter, try to knock
against something, so that the sound reveals
your presence. Oh don't take from me what I
am slowly learning. I'm sure you have gone astray
if you are moved to homesickness for something
in this dimension. We transform these things;
they aren't real, they are only the reflections
upon the polished surface of our being.

I thought you were much further on. It troubles me
that *you* should stray back, you, who have achieved
more transformation than any other woman.
That we were frightened when you died. . . no; rather:
that your stern death broke in upon us, darkly,
wrenching the till-then from the ever-since—
this concerns *us*; setting it all in order
is the task we have continually before us.
But that you too were frightened, and even now
pulse with your fear, where fear can have no meaning;
that you have lost even the smallest fragment
of your eternity, Paula, and have entered
here, where nothing yet exists; that out there,
bewildered for the first time, inattentive,
you didn't grasp the splendor of the infinite

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forces, as on earth you grasped each Thing;
that, from the realm which already had received you,
the gravity of some old discontent
has dragged you back to measurable time—:
this often startles me out of dreamless sleep
at night, like a thief climbing in my window.
If I could say it is only out of kindness,
out of your great abundance, that you have come,
because you are so secure, so self-contained
that you can wander anywhere, like a child,
not frightened of any harm that might await you. . .
But no: you're pleading. This penetrates me, into
my very bones, and cuts at me like a saw.
The bitterest rebuke a ghost could bring me,
could scream to me, at night, when I withdraw
into my lungs, into my intestines,
into the last bare chamber of my heart—
such bitterness would not chill me half so much
as this mute pleading. What is it you want?
Tell me, must I travel? Did you leave
something behind, some place, which cannot bear
your absence? Must I set out for a country
you never saw, although it was as vividly
near to you as your own senses are?
I will sail its rivers, explore its valleys, ask
about its oldest customs; I will stand
for hours, talking with women in their doorways
and waiting, while they call their children home.
I will watch the way they wrap the land around them
as they work in field and meadow; will demand
to be led before their king; will bribe the priests
to take me to their temple, before the most
powerful of the statues in their keeping,
and to leave me there, shutting the gates behind them.
And only then, when I have learned enough,
I will go to watch the animals, and let
something of their composure slowly glide
into my limbs; will see my own existence

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deep in their eyes, which will hold me for a while
and let me go, serenely, without judgment.
I will have the gardeners come to me and recite
many flowers, and in the small clay pots
of their melodious names I will bring back
some remnant of the hundred fragrances.
And fruits: I will buy fruits; and in their sweetness
that country's earth and sky will live again.

For that is what you understood: ripe fruits.
You set them before the canvas, in white bowls,
and weighed out each one's fullness with your colors.
Women too, you saw, were fruits; and children, moulded
from inside, into the shapes of their existence.
And at last, you saw yourself as a fruit, you stepped
out of your clothes and brought your naked body
before the mirror, you let yourself inside
down to your gaze; which stayed in front, immense,
and didn't say, *I am that*; no: *This is*.
So free of curiosity your gaze
had become, so unpossessive, of such true
poverty, it no longer desired even
you yourself; it wanted nothing: holy.

And that is how I have cherished you—deep inside
the mirror, where you put yourself, far away
from all the world. Why have you come like this
and so denied yourself? Why do you want
to convince me that your amber necklace still
was heavy, with a heaviness that cannot
exist in the serene heaven of paintings?
Why such a mournful look? Why do you hold out
your body's contours as if they were your palm,
so that I see the lines only as fate.

Come here, into the lamplight. I'm not afraid
to look the dead in the face. When they return,
they have a right, as much as other things do,
to pause and refresh themselves within our vision.

Come here; let us be silent for a while.
Look at this rose on the corner of my desk:

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isn't the light around it just as timid
as the light on you? It too should not be here,
it should have bloomed and faded in the garden,
outside, never involved with me. But now
it lives on, in its small porcelain vase:
what meaning does it find in my awareness?

Don't be frightened if I understand it now;
it's rising in me, ah, I'm trying to grasp it,
must grasp it, even if I die of it. Must grasp
that you are here. As a blind man grasps an object,
I feel your fate, although I cannot name it.
Let us lament together that someone pulled you
out of your mirror's depths. Can you still cry?
No: I see you can't. You turned your tears'
strength and pressure into your ripe gaze,
and were transforming every fluid inside you
into a stronger life-force, that would rise
and circulate, in equilibrium, blindly.
Then, for the last time, chance came in and tore you
back, from the last step forward on your path,
into a world where bodies have their will.
Not all at once: tore just a shred at first;
but when, around this shred, day after day,
reality expanded, swelled, grew heavy—
you needed your whole self; you went away
and broke yourself into fragments, as you had to,
painstakingly, because your need was great.
Then from the night-warm soilbed of your heart
you dug the seeds, still green, from which your death
would sprout: your own, your perfect death, the one
which was your whole life's perfect consummation.
And swallowed down the green seeds of your death,
like all the others, swallowed them, and were
startled to find an aftertaste of sweetness
you hadn't planned on, a sweetness on your lips, you
who within your senses were so sweet already.

Let us mourn together. Do you know how hesitantly,

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how reluctantly your blood, when you called it back,
returned from its incomparable circuit?
How confused it was to take up once again
the body's narrow circulation; how,
full of mistrust and astonishment, it came
flowing into the placenta and suddenly
was exhausted by the long journey home.
You drove it on, you pushed it forward, you dragged it
up to the hearth, as one would drag a terrified
animal to the sacrificial altar;
and wanted it, after all that, to be happy.
Finally, you compelled it: it was happy,
it ran up and surrendered. And you thought,
because you'd grown accustomed to other measures,
that this would be for just a little while.
But now you were in time, and time is long.
And time goes on, and time grows large, and time
is like a relapse after a long illness.

How short your life was, when it is compared
to those empty hours you passed in silence, bending
the abundant strengths of your abundant future
out of their course, into the new child-seed
that once again was fate. A painful task:
a task beyond all strength. But you performed it
day after day, you dragged yourself in front of it;
you pulled the lovely fabric out of the loom
and wove its threads into a different pattern.
And still had courage enough for celebration.

When it was done, you wished to be rewarded,
like children when they have swallowed down the draught
of bitter tea that perhaps will make them well.
So you chose your own reward, being still so far
removed from people, even then, that no one
could have imagined what reward would please you.
But you yourself knew. You sat up in your childbed
and before you stood a mirror, which gave back
everything, whole. And this everything was you,
and in front of you; inside was mere deception,

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the sweet deception of every woman who smiles
as she puts her jewelry on and combs her hair.
And so you died as women used to die,
at home, in your own warm bedroom, the old-fashioned
death of women in labor, who try to close
themselves again but can't, because that ancient
darkness which they have also given birth to
returns for them, thrusts its way in, and enters.

Once, ritual mourners would have been procured—
women whose job was weeping, who were paid
to howl the whole night through, when all is silent.
That's why you had to come: to claim the mourning
which we omitted. Can you hear me mourn?
I would like to fling my voice out like a cloth
over the fragments of your death, and keep
pulling at it until it is torn to pieces,
and everything I say would walk around
shivering, in the tatters of that voice.
But mourning is not enough. I must accuse:
oh not the man who withdrew you from yourself
(I cannot find him; he looks like everyone),
but in this one man, I accuse: all men.
When somewhere, from deep within me, there arises
the vivid sense of having been a child,
the purity and essence of that childhood
where I once lived: then I can't bear to know it.
I want to form an angel from that sense
and hurl him upwards, into the front row
of angels who cry out, remembering God.
For this suffering has lasted far too long;
none of us can bear it; it is too heavy—
this tangled suffering of spurious love
which, building on convention like a habit,
calls itself just, and fattens on injustice.
Show me a man with the right to his possession.
Who can possess what cannot hold its own self,
but only, now and then, will catch itself

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for a blissful moment, and throw itself away
into the air, as a child throws a ball.
As little as a captain can hold the carved
Nike facing outward from his ship's prow
when the lightness of her godhead suddenly
lifts her up into the bright sea-wind:
so little can one of us call back the woman
who will no longer see us, but, as if
by miracle, sets forth along the narrow
path of her existence, in perfect safety—
unless, that is, he wishes to do wrong.
For this is wrong, if anything is wrong:
not to enlarge the freedom of a love
with all the inner freedom one can summon.
We need, in love, to practice only this:
letting each other go. For holding on
comes easily; we do not need to learn it.

Are you still here? Are you standing in some corner?
You knew so much of all this, you were able
to do so much; you passed through life so open
to all things, like an early morning. I know:
women suffer; for love means being alone;
and artists in their work sometimes intuit
that they must keep transforming, where they love.
You began both; both exist in that
which any fame takes from you and distorts.
Oh you were far beyond all fame; were almost
invisible; had withdrawn your beauty, softly,
as one would lower a brightly-colored flag
on the gray morning after a holiday.
You had just one desire: a years-long work—
which was not finished, in spite of all your efforts.
If you are still here with me, if in this darkness
there is still some place where your spirit resonates
on the shallow sound-waves stirred up by my voice:
hear me; help me. We can so easily
slip back from what we have struggled to attain,

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abruptly, into a life we never wanted;
can find ourselves entangled, as in a dream,
and die there, without ever waking up.
This can occur. Anyone who has lifted
his blood into a years-long work may find
he can't sustain it, the force of gravity
is irresistible, and it falls back, worthless.
For somewhere there is an ancient enmity
between our daily life and the great work.
Help me, in saying it, to understand it.
Do not return. If you can bear to, stay
dead with the dead. The dead have their own tasks.
But help me, if you can without distraction,
as what is farthest sometimes helps: in me.

1908

Fragment of an Elegy

Now shall I praise the cities, those long-surviving
(I watched them in awe) great constellations of earth.
For only in praising is my heart still mine, so violently
do I know the world. And even my most bitter lament
turns into a paean before my disconsolate heart.
Let no one tell me I don't love life, the eternal
presence: I pulsate in her; she bears me; she gives me
the spaciousness of this day, the primeval workday
for me to make use of, and over my existence flings out,
in her magnanimity, nights that have never been.
Her strong hand is above me, and if she should hold me
under,
submerged in destiny, breathless, I would learn how to
breathe
down there. Even her most lightly-entrusted mission
would fill me with songs of her; although I imagine

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that all she wants is for me to be resonant as she is.
Once poets resounded over the battlefield; what voice
now can outshout the rattle of this metallic
age that struggles on toward its careening future?
And indeed it hardly requires the call, its own battle-din
flies into song. Let me stand for a little while
before the transient: not accusing, but once again
admiring, marveling. And if perhaps something founders
in front of my eyes and stirs me into lament,
it is not a reproach. Why shouldn't more youthful nations
rush past the graveyard of cultures long ago rotten?
How pitiful it would be if greatness needed the slightest
indulgence. Let him whose soul is no longer startled
and transformed by palaces, by gardens' boldness, by the
rising
and falling of ancient fountains, by everything held back
in paintings or by the infinite thereness of statues—
let such a person go out to his daily task, where
greatness is lying in ambush and some day, at some turn,
will leap upon him and force him to fight for his life.

1912

Untitled

You who never arrived
in my arms, beloved, who were lost
from the start,
I don't even know what songs
would please you. I have given up
trying to recognize you
in the surging wave of the next
moment. All the immense
images in me—the far-off deeply-felt landscape,
cities, towers, and bridges, and un-
suspected turns in the path,

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and those powerful lands that were once
pulsing with the life of the gods—
all rise within me to mean
you, who forever elude me.

You, beloved, who are all
the gardens I have ever gazed at,
longing. An open window
in a country house—and you almost
stepped out, pensive, to meet me.
Streets that I chanced upon—
you had just walked down them and vanished.
And sometimes, in a shop, a mirror,
was still dizzy with you and, terrified,
gave back my too-sudden image.
Who knows? perhaps the very same
bird echoed through both of us
last night, in our separate rooms. . .

Winter 1913/14

To Hölderlin

We are not permitted to linger, even with what is most
intimate. From images that are full, the spirit's
stream plunges down to others that suddenly must be filled;
there are no lakes till eternity. Here, falling
is best. To fall from the mastered emotion
into the guessed-at, and onwards.

To you, O majestic poet, to you the compelling image,
O caster of spells, was a life, entire; when you uttered it
a line snapped shut like fate; there was a death
even in the mildest, and you walked straight into it; but

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the god who preceded you led you out and beyond it.

O wandering spirit, most wandering of all! How snugly
the others live in their heated poems and stay,
content, in their narrow similes. Taking part. Only you
move like the moon. And underneath, the nocturnal
landscape
brightens and darkens—your holy, your terrified landscape,
which you feel in departures. No one
gave it away more sublimely, gave it back to the universe
more fully, without any need to hold on. So also,
for years that you no longer counted, holy, you played
with infinite joy, as though it were not inside you, but lay
belonging to no one, all around
on the gentle lawns of the earth, where the godlike children
had left it.
Ah, you built what the loftiest spirits have longed for:
free of desire, you laid it, stone upon stone,
till it stood. And when it collapsed, even then
you weren't bewildered.

Why, after such an eternal man lived, do we still
lack faith in the earthly? and not reverently learn from
transience
the emotions for what future
slopes of the heart, in pure space?

1914

The Vast Night

Often I gazed at you in wonder: stood at the window begun
the day before, stood and gazed at you in wonder. As yet
the new town
seemed denied to me, and the unpersuaded landscape kept
darkening
as though I didn't exist. Even the nearest things

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made not the slightest effort to be understood. The road
thrust itself up to the streetlamp: I saw it was a stranger.
Across the way, a room: clarified in the lamplight,
accessible; already I took part; they felt that, and closed the shutters.
Stood. Then a child cried. I knew that the mothers
were all around, in the houses—what they could do; and knew also,
all at once, the inconsolable causes of all tears.
Or a voice sang, and reached out a little beyond
expectation; or downstairs an old man let out
a cough full of reproach, as though his body were in the right
against the mild world. Then the hour
struck—but I counted too late, it tumbled on past me. . . .
Like a new boy at school, who is finally allowed to join in,
but he can't catch the ball, is helpless at all the games
the others pursue with such ease among themselves, and he stands there
and stares off into the distance (where?)—so I stood and suddenly
grasped it was you: *you* were playing with me,
grown-up Night, and I gazed at you in wonder. Where the towers
were raging, where with averted fate
a town surrounded me, and indecipherable mountains
camped against me, and the unknown, in narrowing circles,
prowled hungry around the random
flickerings of my emotions—: then, lofty Night,
you were not ashamed to know me. Your breath
moved over me. And, spread across solemn distances,
your smile entered my heart.

1914

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Death

There stands death, a bluish distillate
in a cup without a saucer. Such a strange
place to find a cup: standing on
the back of a hand. One recognizes clearly
the line along the glazed curve, where the handle
snapped. Covered with dust. And *Hope* is written
across the side, in a faded Gothic script.

The man who was to drink out of that cup
read it aloud at breakfast, long ago.

What kind of beings are they then,
who finally must be scared away by poison?

Otherwise would they stay here? Would they keep
chewing so foolishly on their own frustration?
The hard present moment must be pulled
out of them, like a set of false teeth.
Then they mumble. Then they go on mumbling. . .

O falling star,
once seen into from a bridge—:
Not to forget you. To endure.

1915

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Untitled

What birds plunge through is not the intimate space
in which you see all forms intensified.
(Out in the Open, you would be denied
your self and disappear into that vastness.)

Space reaches *from* us and construes the world.
To know a tree, in its true element,
throw inner space around it, from that pure
abundance in you. Surround it with restraint.
It has no limits. Not till it is held
in your renouncing is it truly there.

1924

Untitled

World was in the face of the beloved.
Suddenly it poured out and was gone:
world is outside, world cannot be grasped.

Why didn't I, while I could hold it up,
drink from the full, from the beloved face,
world, so near that I could almost taste it?

Ah, I drank. Insatiably I drank.
But I was filled up also, with too much
world and, drinking, I myself ran over.

1924

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O Lacrimosa

(trilogy for future music of Ernst Křenek)

I

Oh tear-filled one who, like a sky held back,
grows heavy above the landscape of her sorrow.
And when she weeps, the gentle raindrops fall,
slanting upon the sandbed of her heart.

Oh heavy with weeping. Scale to weigh all tears.
Who felt herself not sky, since she was clear
and surely sky exists because the clouds do.

How clear it is, how close, your land of sorrow,
beneath the stern sky's oneness. Like a face
that lies there, slowly waking up and thinking
horizontally, into endless depths.

II

It is nothing but a breath, the void. And that green
fulfillment
of blossoming trees: a breath.
We, who are still the breathed-upon,
today still the breathed-upon, count
this slow breathing of earth,
whose hurry we are.

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III

Ah, but the winters! This secret
turning-within of the earth. There,
around the dead, in the pure receding of sap,
boldness is gathered,
the boldness of future springs.
Where imagination occurs
beneath what is rigid; where the green
worn thin by the timeless summers
again turns into a new
insight and the mirror of intuition;
where the flowers' colors
forget what our eyes have grown used to.

1925

Elegy

(to Marina Tsvetayeva)

Oh the losses into the All, Marina, the stars that are falling!
We can't make it larger, wherever we fling ourselves, to whatever
star we may go! In the Whole, all things are already numbered.
So when anyone falls, the perfect sum is not lessened.
Whoever lets go in his fall, dives into the source and is healed.
Is all of life, then, a game, a meaningless fluctuation
of sameness, nowhere a name, nowhere a lasting achievement?
Waves, Marina, we are ocean! Depths, Marina, we are sky.
Earth, Marina, we are earth, a thousand times springtime, like larks

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that a song bursting out of their breast flings into invisible heights.
We begin it as joy, and already it wholly surpasses us;
suddenly the force of our heaviness bends the song down to lament.
Yet isn't lament really a younger, descending joy?
Even the gods below want to be praised, Marina.
So innocent are gods, they listen for praise like children.
Praising, my dearest—let us be lavish with praise.
Nothing really belongs to us. We put our hands lightly around
the necks of unbroken flowers. I saw it on the Nile, in Kôm-Ombo.
Just so, Marina, the kings gave away the gifts they renounced.
As angels stop and put marks on the doors of those to be saved,
we—though we seem to be tender—grant our touch to this thing or that.
Ah, how remote already, how inattentive, Marina,
even in our innermost pretence. Signallers: nothing more.
This silent commerce, when life is no longer willing
to endure one of our kind, when it seizes him in its grip,
avenges itself, kills. For the fact that its strength *can* kill
was plain to us from its delicacy and restraint
and from the curious power that transforms us from living beings
into survivors. Non-being. Do you remember how often
a blind command would carry us through the icy
waiting room of new birth? . . . Us?—a body of eyes
under numberless lids, refusing. Carried the down-
thrown heart in our breast, the heart of a whole generation.
To a goal as welcome as the temperate lands are for migrating birds,
it carried the soaring image and plan of our transformation.
Lovers were not, Marina, *are* not permitted to know

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so much of failure. Must be as if they were new.
Only their grave is old, only *it* ponders and darkens
under the sobbing tree, remembering all that has been.
Only their grave collapses; *they* are supple as reeds;
what bends them too far, rounds them into rich garlands.
How they blow about in the May wind! From the midst of the Ever,
in which you breathe and surmise, the moment has shut them out.
(Oh how I understand you, delicate flower on the same
imperishable stalk. How wildly I fling myself into the night air
that breathes upon you.) The gods long ago learned
how to dissemble halves. We, drawn into the cycle,
filled ourselves out to the whole, like the disk of the moon.
Even in time of waning, in the weeks of our gradual change,
nothing could ever again help us to fulfillment, except
our own solitary course over the sleepless landscape.

1926

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What I Have Been Doing Lately

Jamaica Kincaid

What I have been doing lately: I was lying in bed and the doorbell rang. I ran downstairs. Quick. I opened the door. There was no one there. I stepped outside. Either it was drizzling or there was a lot of dust in the air and the dust was damp. I stuck out my tongue and the drizzle or the damp dust tasted like government school ink. I looked north. I looked south. I decided to start walking north. While walking north I decided that I didn't have any shoes on my feet and that is why I was walking so fast. While walking north I looked up and saw the planet Venus and said, "It must be almost morning." I saw a monkey in a tree. The tree had no leaves. I said, "Aa, monkey. Must look at that. A monkey." I walked for I don't know how long before I came up to a big body of water. The big body of water was blue and silver and rippled and looked as if it had been a painting painted by a woman. I wanted to get across it but I couldn't swim. I wanted to get across it but it would take me years to build a boat. I wanted to get across it but it would take me I didn't know how long to build a bridge. Years

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passed and then one day, feeling like it, I got into my boat and rowed across. When I got to the other side it was noon and my shadow was small and fell parallel to me. I set out on a path that stretched out straight ahead of me. I passed a house and a dog was sitting on the verandah but looked the other way when it saw me coming. I passed a goat eating green grass in a pasture but the goat looked the other way when it saw me coming. I walked and I walked but I couldn't tell if I walked a long time because my feet didn't feel as if they would drop off. I turned around to look behind me to see what I had left behind but nothing was familiar. Instead of the straight path, I saw hills. Instead of the green grass in a pasture, I saw tall flowering trees. I looked up and the sky was without clouds and seemed near as if it were the ceiling in my house and if I stood on a chair I could touch it with the tips of my fingers. I turned around and looked ahead of me again. A deep hole had opened up in front of me. I looked in but the hole was so deep and so dark that I couldn't see the bottom. I thought, What's down there?, so on purpose I fell in. I fell and I fell, over and over as if I were an old suitcase. On the sides of the deep hole I could see things written but perhaps it was in a foreign language because I couldn't read them. Still I fell, for I don't know how long. As I fell I began to see that I didn't like the way falling made me feel. Falling made me feel sick and I missed all the people I had loved. I said, I don't want to fall anymore and I reversed myself. I was standing again on the edge of the deep hole. I looked at the deep hole and I said, You can close up now and it did. I walked some more without knowing distance, I only knew that I passed through days and nights, I only know that I passed through rain and shine, light and darkness. I was never thirsty and I felt no pain. Looking at the horizon I made a joke for myself: I said, "The earth has thin lips" and I laughed. Looking at the horizon again, I saw a lone figure coming towards me but I wasn't frightened because I was sure it was my mother. As I got closer to the figure I could see that it wasn't my mother but still I wasn't frightened because I could see that it was a woman.

When I got closer to this woman I saw that I had never seen her face before so I looked hard at it because what if I saw it

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again. When this woman got closer to me she looked at me hard and then she threw up her hands and I realised that she had seen me before because she said, "It's you. Just look at that. It's you. And just what it is you have been doing lately?"

I could have said, "A school of fish, though each of them completely different, swam together aimlessly."

I could have said, "A number of men, some bald, some wearing wigs, attended a boxing match."

I could have said, "A pack of dogs, tired from chasing each other all over town, slept in the moonlight."

Instead I said, What I have been doing lately: I was lying in bed on my back, my hands drawn up, my fingers interlaced lightly at the nape of my neck. Someone rang the doorbell. I went downstairs and opened the door but there was no one there. I stepped outside. Either it was drizzling or there was a lot of dust in the air and the dust was damp. I stuck out my tongue and the drizzle or the damp dust tasted like government school ink. I looked north and I looked south. I started walking north. While walking north I wanted to move fast, so I removed the shoes from my feet. While walking north I looked up and saw the planet Venus and I said, "If the sun went out it would be eight minutes before I would know it." I saw a monkey sitting in a tree that had no leaves and I said, "A monkey. Just look at that. A monkey." So I picked up a stone and I threw it at the monkey. The monkey seeing the stone quickly moved out of its way. Three times I threw a stone at the monkey and three times it moved away. Then the fourth time I threw the stone the monkey caught it and then threw it back at me. The stone struck me on my forehead and over my right eye, making a deep gash. The gash healed immediately but now the skin on my forehead felt false to me. I walked for I don't know how long before I came to a big body of water. The big body of water was blue and silver and rippled and looked as if it had been a painting painted by a woman. I wanted to get across so when the boat came I paid my fare. When I got to the other side I saw a lot of people sitting on the beach and they were having a picnic. They were the most beautiful people I had ever seen. Everything about them was black and shiny. Their skin was

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black and shiny. Their shoes were black and shiny. Their hair was black and shiny. The clothes they wore were black and shiny. I could hear them laughing and chatting and I said, I would like to be with these people, so I started to walk towards them, but when I got up close to them I saw that they weren't at a picnic and they weren't beautiful and they weren't chatting and laughing. All around me was black mud and the people all looked as if they had been made up out of the black mud. I looked up and saw that the sky seemed far away and nothing I could stand on would make me able to touch it with my fingertips. I thought, If only I could get out of this, so I started to walk. I must have walked for a long time because my feet hurt and felt as if they would drop off. I thought, If only just around the bend I would see my house and inside my house I would find my bed freshly made at that, and in the kitchen I would find my mother or anyone else that I loved making me a custard. I thought, If only it was a Sunday and I was sitting in a church and I had just heard someone sing a Psalm. I sat down because I wanted to see myself but then I couldn't find a mirror and that made me sad. I felt so sad that I rested my head on my knees and smoothed my own head. I felt so sad I couldn't imagine feeling any other way again. So I said, I don't like this. I don't want to do this anymore. And I went back to lying in bed, just before the doorbell rang.

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Portfolio

Untitled Film Stills

Cindy Sherman

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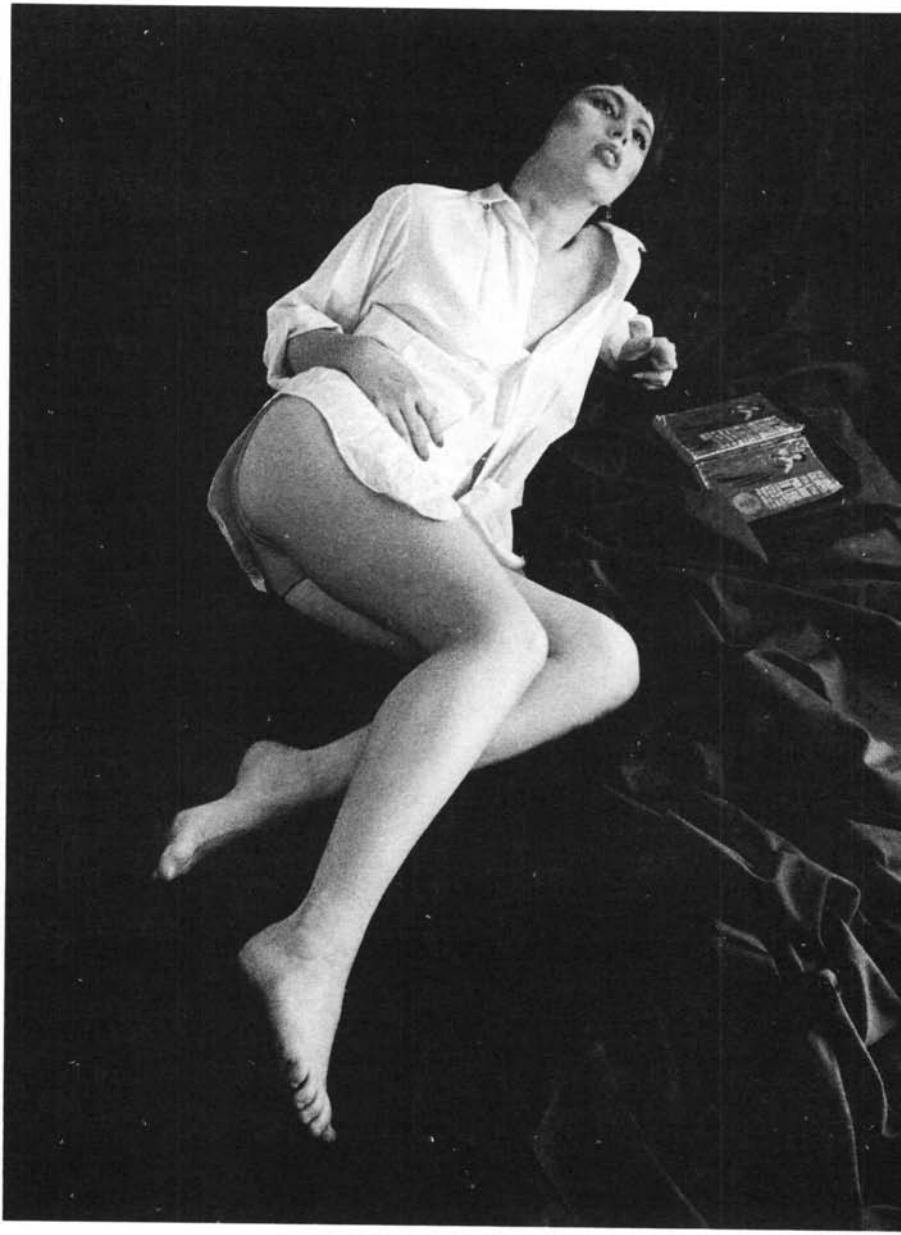

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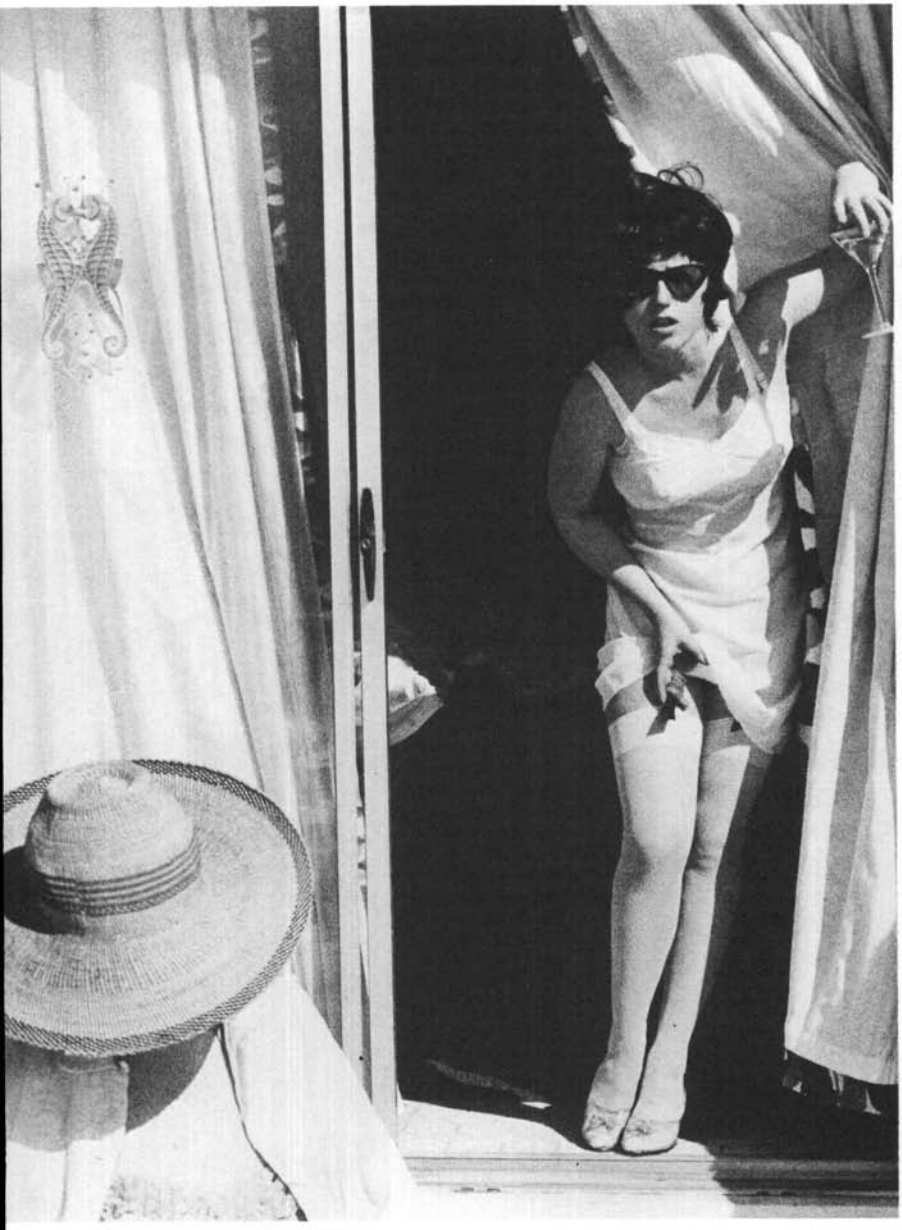

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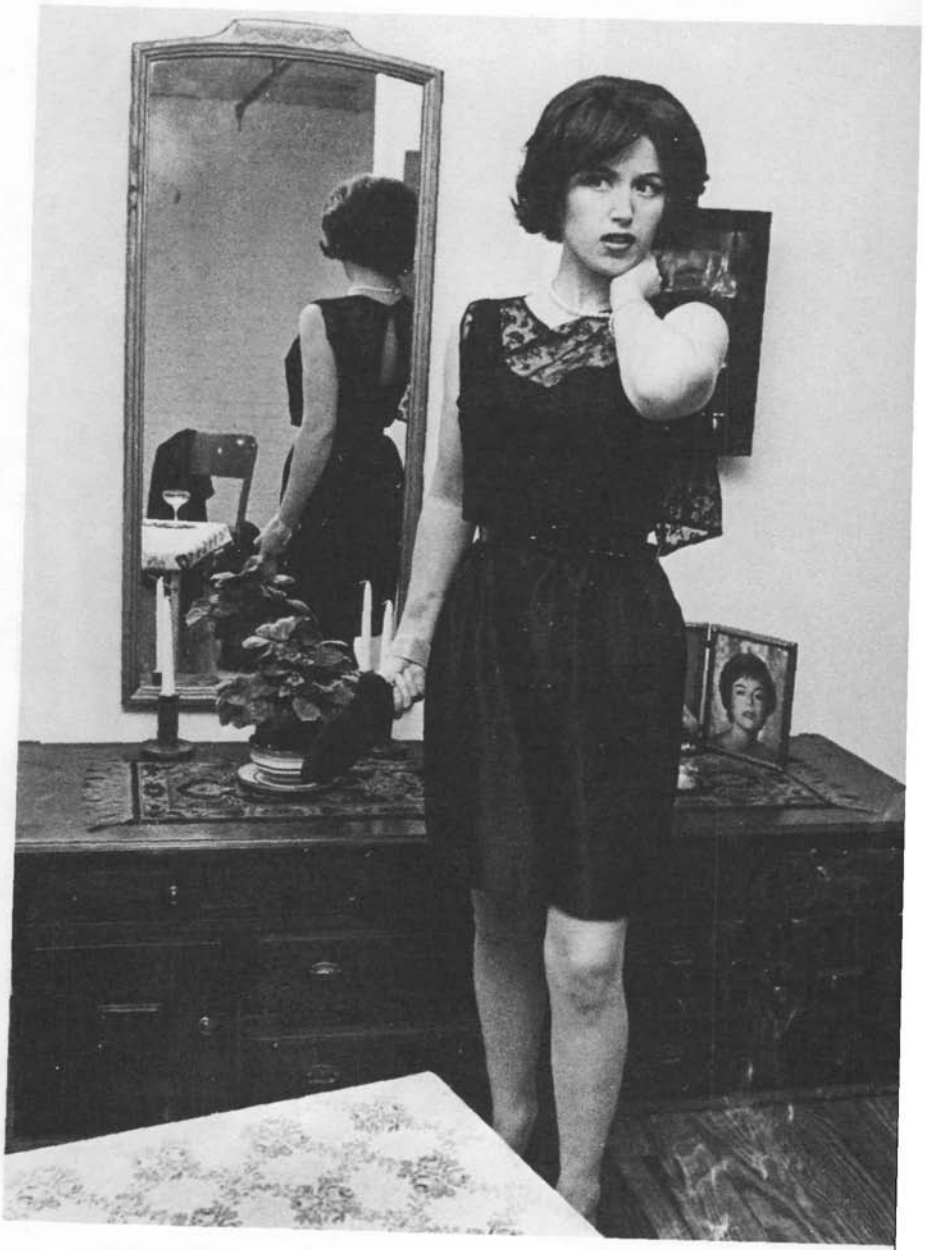

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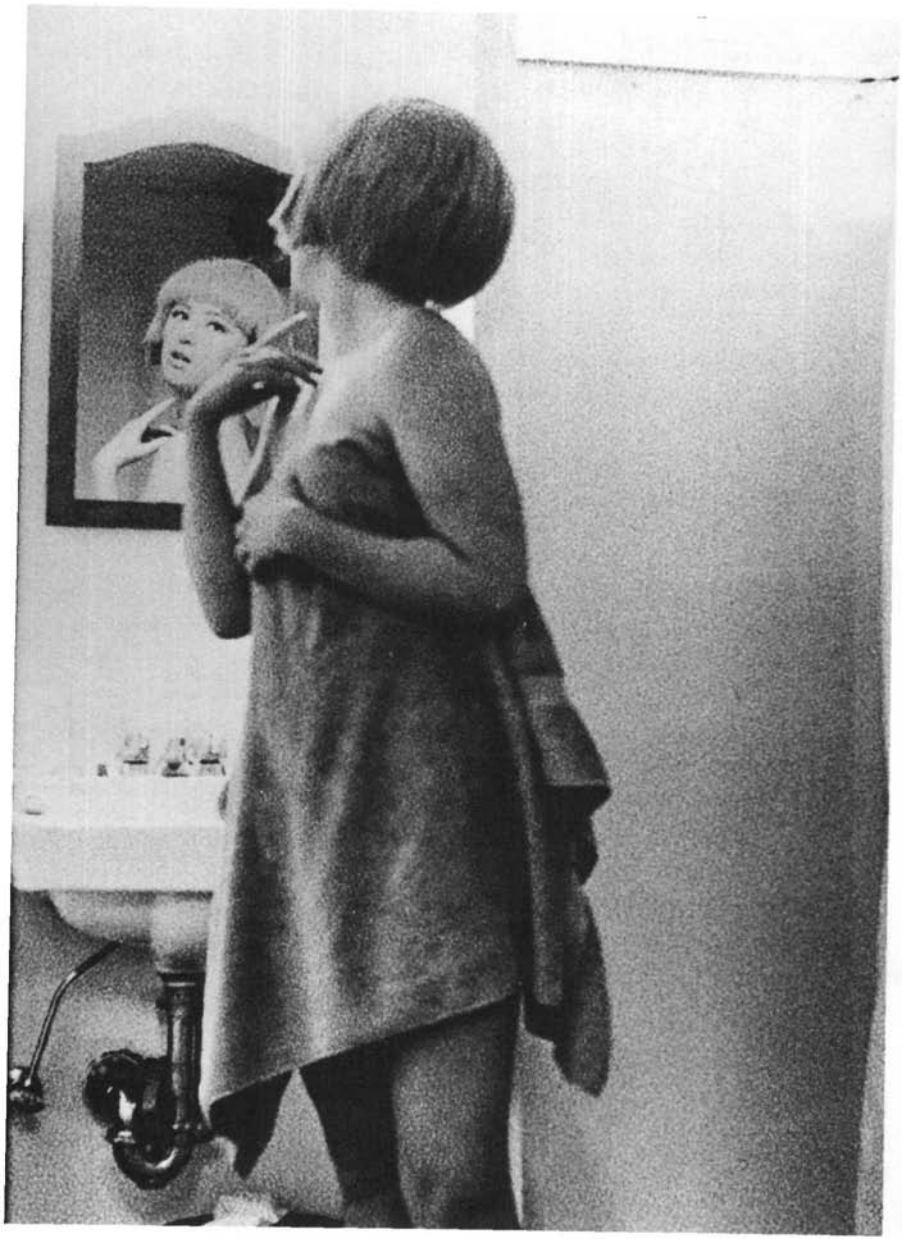

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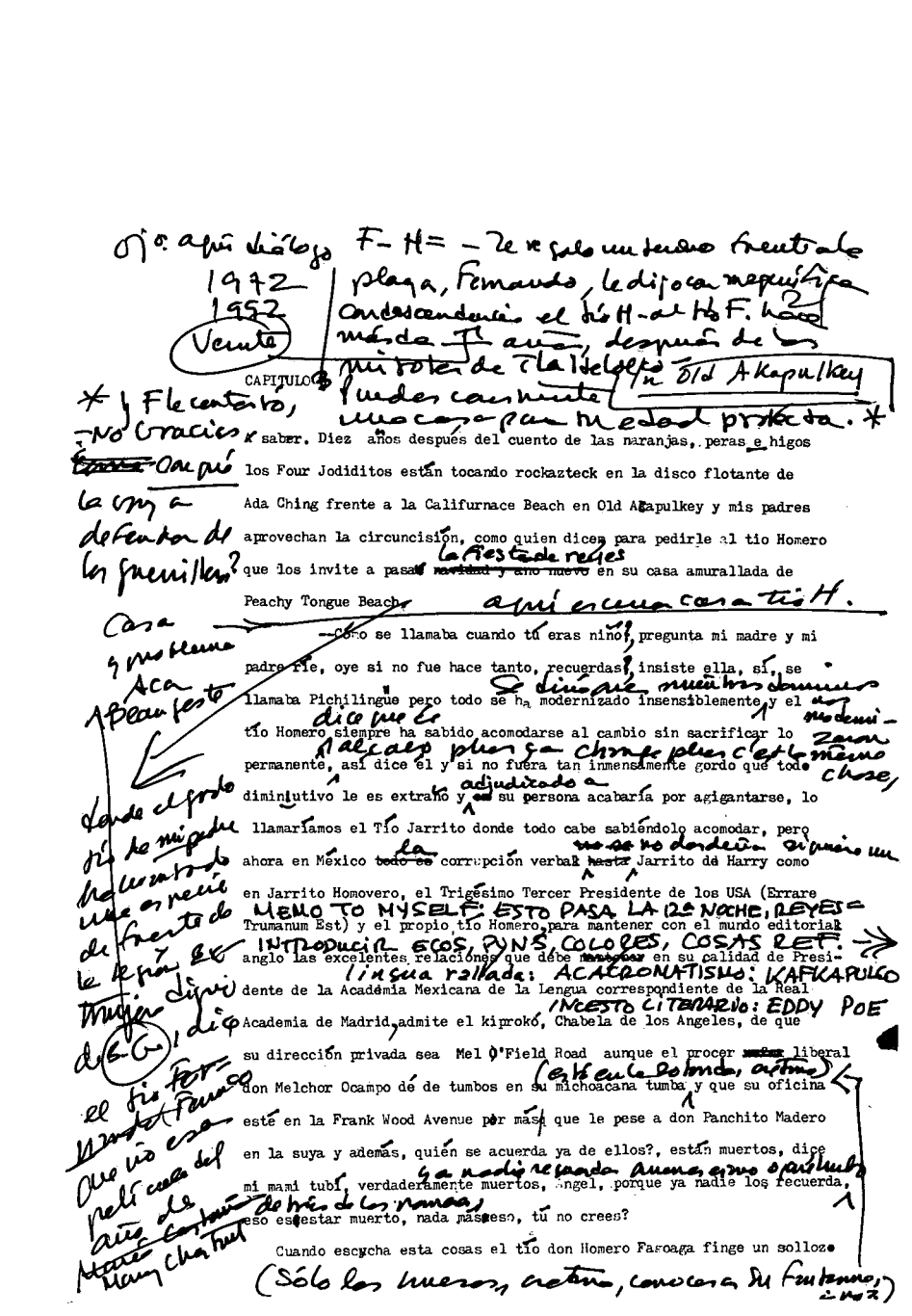

CAPITULO 3

saber. Diez años después del cuento de las naranjas, peras e higos los Four Jodiditos están tocando rockazteck en la disco flotante de Ada Ching frente a la Califurnace Beach en Old Acapulkey y mis padres aprovechan la circuncisión, como quien dice para pedirle al tío Homero que los invite a pasar ~~navidad y año nuevo~~ en su casa amurallada de Peachy Tongue Beach

—¿Cómo se llamaba cuando tú eras niño? pregunta mi madre y mi padre ríe, oye si no fue hace tanto, recuerdas? insiste ella, sí, se llamaba Pichilingue pero todo se ha modernizado insensiblemente y el tío Homero siempre ha sabido acomodarse al cambio sin sacrificar lo permanente, así dice él y si no fuera tan inmensamente gordo que todo diminutivo le es extraño y su persona acabaría por agigantarse, lo llamaríamos el Tío Jarrito donde todo cabe sabiéndolo acomodar, pero ahora en México ~~todo es~~ corrupción verbal ~~hasta~~ Jarrito de Harry como en Jarrito Homovero, el Trigésimo Tercer Presidente de los USA (Errare Trumanum Est) y el propio tío Homero para mantener con el mundo editorial anglo las excelentes relaciones que debe ~~mantener~~ en su calidad de Presidente de la Academia Mexicana de la Lengua correspondiente de la Real Academia de Madrid, admite el kiproko, Chabela de los Angeles, de que su dirección privada sea Mel O'Field Road aunque el procer ~~sea~~ liberal don Melchor Ocampo dé de tumbos en su michoacana tumba y que su oficina esté en la Frank Wood Avenue por más que le pese a don Panchito Madero en la suya y además, quién se acuerda ya de ellos?, están muertos, dice mi mamá tubí, verdaderamente muertos, ángel, porque ya nadie los recuerda, eso es estar muerto, nada más eso, tú no crees?

Cuando escucha esta cosas el tío don Homero Fascaga finge un sollozo

A manuscript page from Carlos Fuentes's novel in progress, Cristóbal Nonato.

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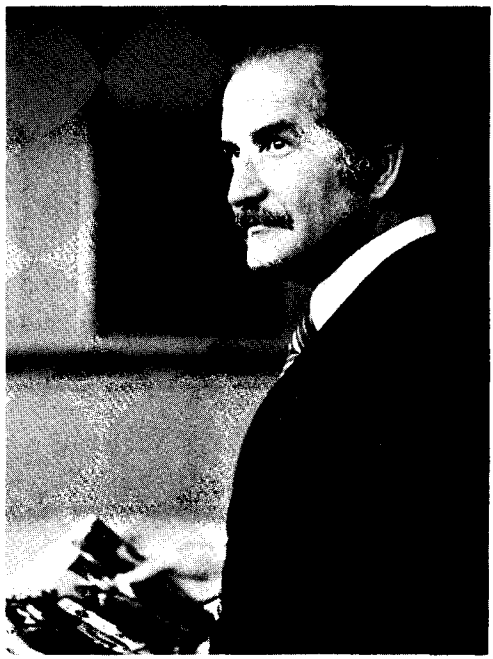

Jerry Bauer

The Art of Fiction LXVIII

Carlos Fuentes

Carlos Fuentes was interviewed on a snowy December day at his home in Princeton, New Jersey—a large Victorian house in the old residential section. He is a tall, heavyset man, dressed on that winter's day in a turtleneck sweater and jacket. The Fuentes's house was lightly heated in the European manner and felt chilly. A Christmas tree stood in the drawing room. His two young children were out ice-skating with Mrs. Fuentes. A considerable art collection was on display in the room—Oriental bronzes, pre-Columbian ceramics, and Spanish colonial Santos—reflecting Fuentes's cultural background and his

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various diplomatic assignments. On the walls were paintings and prints by Picabia, Miró, Matta, Vasarely, among others—most of them gifts given him by artist friends.

The interview was conducted in the library in front of a blazing fire with a hot pot of coffee available. The walls were lined with books. It is at a simple desk in this room that Carlos Fuentes does his work—in front of a window that on this December day looked out on ice-laden shrubbery and trees barely visible in the snow flurries.

•

In 1958, he startled Mexico with Where the Air is Clear, *a caustic analysis of Mexico after the 1910-1920 revolution;* The Good Conscience *(1959), a* bildungsroman *that describes the education of Jaime Ceballos and his ultimate absorption into the Mexican establishment;* The Death of Artemio Cruz *(1962), inspired in part by Orson Welles's* Citizen Kane; Holy Place *(1967) and* A Change of Skin *(1968), both of which deal with Mexico, albeit from totally different perspectives:* Holy Place *traces the Oedipal meanderings of a young man infatuated with his mother;* A Change of Skin *studies Mexico in relation to the "outside world" of the Sixties by examining the relationships between foreigners and Mexicans.*

Terra Nostra *(1976) strikes out in a different direction. There Fuentes investigates the Mediterranean roots of Hispanic culture in order to discover where that culture "went wrong." He finds its fatal sin in Philip II's maniacal search for purity and orthodoxy, his ruthless extirpation of the heterodox (Jewish and Arabian) elements in Spanish culture.* Terra Nostra, *along with Fuentes's recent essays on Cervantes, marks a new epoch in pan-Hispanic studies, a new way to find unity in the fragmented Hispanic world.*

The Hydra Head *(1979) returns to contemporary Mexico so that Fuentes can study the nature of power, symbolized by Mexico's oil deposits. This year Fuentes has published (in Spanish)* Distant Relations, *an examination of the writer's need to know all and tell all, and (in English)* Burnt Water, *a collection of short stories from various periods in the author's*

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career.

From 1975 to 1977, Carlos Fuentes was Mexican ambassador to France. During those two years, he found it impossible to write. Since 1977, Fuentes has lived in Princeton, and taught alternately at the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University.

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The interview began with Fuentes's description of his return to writing after he left his ambassadorial post.

FUENTES

I left my post as ambassador to France on the first of April, 1977, and immediately rented a house on the outskirts of Paris where I could begin to write again. I had not written a word for two years, being a conscientious diplomat. The house I rented, as it turned out, had belonged to Gustave Doré and it brought back all my yearnings for form and terror. Doré's illustrations for "Little Red Riding Hood" for example: they're so incredibly erotic! The little girl in bed with the wolf! Those were the signs under which my latest novel, *Distant Relations*, was born.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you find it impossible to write while you were ambassador?

FUENTES

Diplomacy in a sense is the opposite of writing. You have to disperse yourself so much: the lady who comes in crying because she's had a fight with the secretary; exports and imports; students in trouble; thumbtacks for the embassy. Writing requires the concentration of the writer, demands that nothing else be done except that. So I have all this pent-up energy which is flowing out right now. I'm writing a great deal these days. Besides, I have learned how to write. I didn't know how to write before and I guess I learned by being a bureaucrat.

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You have so much mental time on your hands when you are a bureaucrat: you have time to think and to learn how to write in your head. When I was a young man I suffered a great deal because I faced the challenge of Mallarmé's blank page every day without knowing exactly what I was going to say. I fought the page and paid for it with ulcers. I made up for it with sheer vigor, because you have vigor when you are writing in your twenties and thirties. Then later on you have to use your energy wisely. When I look back on it, I think perhaps it was the fact that I was behind an official desk for two years that left my mind free to write within itself, to prepare what I was going to write once I left that post. So now I can write before I sit down to write, I can use the blank page in a way I couldn't before.

INTERVIEWER

Tell us how the process of writing takes place within you.

FUENTES

I am a morning writer; I am writing at eight-thirty in longhand and I keep at it until twelve-thirty, when I go for a swim. Then I come back, have lunch, and read in the afternoon until I take my walk for the next day's writing. I must write the book out in my head now, before I sit down. I always follow a triangular pattern on my walks here in Princeton: I go to Einstein's house on Mercer Street, then down to Thomas Mann's house on Stockton Street, then over to Herman Broch's house on Evelyn Place. After visiting those three places, I return home, and by that time I have mentally written tomorrow's six or seven pages.

INTERVIEWER

You write in longhand?

FUENTES

First I write it out in longhand and then when I feel I "have" it, I let it rest. Then I correct the manuscript and type it out myself, correcting it until the last moment.

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INTERVIEWER

Is the rewriting extensive or is most of the rewriting taken into account during the mental writing?

FUENTES

By the time I get it on paper, it is practically finished: there are no missed sections or scenes. I know basically how things are going and I have it more or less fixed, but at the same time I am sacrificing the element of surprise in myself. Everyone who writes a novel knows he is involved in the Proustian problem of in some way knowing what he is going to write and at the same time being amazed at what is actually coming out. Proust only wrote when he had lived what he was going to write, and yet he had to write as though he knew nothing about it—which is extraordinary. In a way we are all involved in the same adventure: to know what you are going to say, to have control over your material, and at the same time to have that margin of freedom which is discovery, amazement, and a precondition of the freedom of the reader.

INTERVIEWER

It's possible in England and the United States to write a history of editors and their influence on literature. Would such a history be possible in the Hispanic world?

FUENTES

Impossible, because the dignity of Spanish *hidalgos* would never allow a menial laborer to come and tell us what to do with our own work. It comes from the fact that we are caught in a terrible kind of schizophrenia made up of extreme pride, and extreme individualism which we inherited from Spain. The *hidalgo* expects everyone else to respect him, just as he kowtows to superior power. If you were to try to edit anyone's text in Latin America, even a hack, he would resign immediately, accusing you of censoring or insulting him.

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INTERVIEWER

You would say then that your relationship to your society is rather different from that of an American writer? That, for example, the *hidalgo* image suggests the greater dignity of writing in your culture?

FUENTES

My situation as a Mexican writer is like that of writers from Eastern Europe. We have the privilege of speech in societies where it is rare to have that privilege. We speak for others, which is very important in Latin America, as it is in Central Europe. Of course you have to pay for that power: either you serve the community or you fall flat on your face.

INTERVIEWER

Does that mean that you see yourself as the official representative of your culture?

FUENTES

No, I hope not. Because I always remember that remark by the French Surrealist Jacques Vaché, "Nothing kills a man as much as having to represent his country." So I hope it isn't true.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see a difference between the social roles of American and Latin American writers?

FUENTES

We have to do more things in our culture than American writers do in theirs. They can have more time for themselves and for their writing, whereas we have social demands. Pablo Neruda used to say that every Latin American writer goes around dragging a heavy body, the body of his people, of his past, of his national history. We have to assimilate the enormous weight of our past so we will not forget what gives us life. If you forget your past, you die. You fulfill certain functions for the collectivity because they are obligations you

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have as a citizen, not as a writer. Despite that, you reserve your esthetic freedom and your esthetic privileges. This creates a tension, but I think it is better to have the tension than to have no tension at all, as sometimes happens in the United States.

INTERVIEWER

In your earlier works you focus on the life of Mexico after the 1910-1920 Revolution. That is your Mexico and I can see you in those works as a Mexican writer. But after you became so popular internationally, say with *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, I wonder if your concept of your role changed?

FUENTES

No. I think all writers live off of obsessions. Some of these come from history, others are purely individual, and still others belong to the realm of the purely obsessive, which is the most universal thing a writer has in his soul. My obsessions are in all my books: they have to do with fear. All of my books are about fear—the universal sensation of fear about who might be coming through the door, about who desires me, whom do I desire and how can I achieve my desire. Is the object of my desire the subject of my desire in the mirror I am watching? These obsessions are in all my works along with the more general, historical context I deal with, but both in history and individuality, my theme is being incomplete because we fear the world and ourselves.

INTERVIEWER

You spoke of writing in your head while you were ambassador and continuing to do so now that you are writing again. I wonder if at some point—especially since you are away from your country and speaking a different language—writing first in your head and editing mentally has changed the nature of your writing.

FUENTES

You must understand that I am a peculiar case in Mexican literature because I grew up far from Mexico, because Mexico is

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an imaginary space for me, and has never ceased to be so, I might add. My Mexico and my Mexican history take place in my mind. Its history is something I have dreamed, imagined, and is not the actual history of the country. When as a young man I finally went to live in Mexico, of course I had to compare my dreams, my fears of that country with reality. This created a profound tension, the result of which was *Where the Air is Clear*, a book nobody else could have written in Mexico. Nobody had written a novel about the post-Revolutionary era as it was reflected in the city, in the social structure, in the survival of so many ancient strands of our imaginary and historical life. This came, I say, out of my discovering Mexico with a sense of fear and enchantment when I was fifteen years old. Being outside of Mexico has always helped me enormously.

INTERVIEWER

Are you saying that seeing Mexico from both a physical and a mental distance enables you to see it more clearly than you could if you were there?

FUENTES

Yes, I have a perspective on Mexico which is renewed, you see, by surprise. Quevedo, the great Spanish baroque poet, expresses this when he says, "Nothing astonishes me because the world has bewitched me." I am still bewitched by Mexico. As you say, I live using a different language, but this helps me enormously with the Spanish language. I grew up with American English and yet I was able to maintain my Spanish. Spanish became something I had to maintain and recreate. When I am outside of Mexico, the same sensation of being alone with the language and wrestling with it becomes extremely powerful, whereas when I am in Mexico, it is immediately debased into asking for coffee, answering the phone, and whatnot. For me Spanish becomes an extraordinary experience when I am outside of Mexico. I feel I have to maintain it for myself. It becomes a very demanding fact of my life.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been tempted to write in English?

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FUENTES

No, I very soon came to realize that the English language did not need one more writer. That the English language has an unbroken tradition of excellence and when it goes to sleep there is always an Irishman who appears and wakes it up.

INTERVIEWER

Knowing so many languages, which language do you dream in?

FUENTES

I dream in Spanish; I also make love in Spanish—this has created tremendous confusion at times, but I can only do it in Spanish. Insults in other languages don't mean a damn thing to me, but an insult in Spanish really sets me hopping. Let me tell you about a curious experience I had this summer. I was writing a novella about the adventures of Ambrose Bierce in Mexico. Bierce went to Mexico during the Revolution, in 1914, to join up with Pancho Villa's army. I had the problem that the voice had to be Bierce's, and it was extremely difficult to render in Spanish. I had to make Bierce speak with his voice, which is available to me in his stories, so I wrote the novella in English. It was an absolutely terrifying experience. I would be writing along in English when suddenly from under the table Mr. Faulkner would appear and say aah, aah, can't do that, and from behind the door Mr. Melville would appear and say, can't do it, can't do it. All these ghosts appeared; the narrative tradition in English asserted itself so forcefully that it hamstrung me. I felt very sorry for my North American colleagues who have to write with all these people hanging from the chandeliers and rattling the dishes. You see, in Spanish we have to fill in the great void that exists between the Seventeenth and the Twentieth centuries. Writing is more of an adventure, more of a challenge. There is only a great desert between Cervantes and ourselves, if you except two Nineteenth century novelists, Clarin and Galdos.

INTERVIEWER

Is this one of the reasons for the epic surge in Latin American

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novels, this effort to encompass more social and historical perspectives in each work?

FUENTES

Well, I remember ten years ago I was talking to an American writer, Donald Barthelme, and he said, "How do you do it in Latin America? How do you manage to write these immense novels? Come up with all these subjects, these very, very long novels? Is there no paper shortage in Latin America? How do you do these things? We find we have great difficulty in the United States as American writers to find subjects. We write slim books, slimmer and slimmer books." But what I answered on that occasion is that our problem is that we feel we have everything to write about. That we have to fill four centuries of silence. That we have to give voice to all that has been silenced by history.

INTERVIEWER

You do feel that Latin American writers are trying to create a cultural identity for themselves?

FUENTES

Yes, and here I think we have a very strong link with the writers of Central and Eastern Europe. If you had asked me today where the novel is alive and kicking, I would say it's basically in Latin America and in so-called Eastern Europe which the Czechoslovaks insist on calling Central Europe. They think of Eastern Europe as Russia. In any case, there you have two cultural zones where people feel that things have to be said, and if the writer does not say them, nobody will say them. This creates a tremendous responsibility; it puts a tremendous weight on the writer, and also creates a certain confusion, because one could say, Oh, the mission is important, the theme is important, therefore the book has to be good, and that is not always the case. How many novels have you read in Latin America that are full of good intentions—denouncing the plight of the Bolivian miner, of the Ecuadorian banana picker—and turn out to be terrible novels which do nothing for the Bolivian tin miner or the Ecuadorian banana picker, or anything for litera-

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ture either. . . failing on all fronts because they have nothing but good intentions.

But still, we had a whole past to talk about. A past that was silent, that was dead, and that you had to bring alive through language. And so for me writing was basically this need to establish an identity, to establish a link to my country and to a language which I—along with many other writers of my generation—felt we in some way had to slap around, and wake up, as if we were playing the game of Sleeping Beauty.

INTERVIEWER

Can it be said, though, that you are speaking for several generations of Spanish and Latin American writers who have a double culture, who have one foot in their local culture and the other in an external, Western culture?

FUENTES

One of the basic cultural factors of Latin America is that it is an eccentric branch of the culture of the West. It is Western and it is not Western. So we feel that we have to know the culture of the West even better than a Frenchman or an Englishman, and at the same time we have to know our own culture. This sometimes means going back to the Indian cultures, whereas the Europeans feel they don't have to know our cultures at all. We have to know Quetzalcoatl *and* Descartes. They think Descartes is enough. So Latin America is a constant reminder to Europe of the duties of its universality. Therefore, a writer like Borges is a typically Latin American writer. The fact that he is so European only indicates that he is Argentinian. No European would feel obliged to go to the extremes Borges does to create a reality, not to mirror a reality but to create a new reality to fill in the cultural voids of his own tradition.

INTERVIEWER

Which writers are missing from the evolution of fiction in Spanish? You mentioned Faulkner and Melville, and I could easily imagine Balzac and Dickens.

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FUENTES

They are all present because we have appropriated them. Your question is important because it emphasizes the fact that Latin American writers have to appropriate the writers of other traditions in order to fill a void. Sometimes, to our astonishment, we discover an extraordinary sense of coincidence. A lot of fuss has been made about the great influence of Joyce and Faulkner on the Latin American novel. Well, two things have to be said: first, the poets of the Spanish language in the earlier part of this century coincide with the great poets of the English language. Neruda is writing at the same time as Eliot, but Neruda is writing in a rain-drenched town in southern Chile where there are no libraries. Nevertheless, he is on the same wavelength as Eliot. It is the poets who have maintained the language for us novelists: without the poets, without Neruda, Vallejo, Paz, Huidobro, or Gabriela Mistral, there would be no Latin American novel. Second, the great modern novelists of Europe and the United States have revolutionized the sense of time in the Western novel as it had been conceived since the Eighteenth century, since Defoe, Richardson, and Smollett. This breaking up of time, this refusal to accept the singular concept of linear time which the West had been imposing economically and politically, coincides profoundly with our sense of circular time, which comes from the Indian religions. Our idea of time as a spiral, our basic historical vision, is derived both from Vico and from our everyday experience of times that coexist. You have the Iron Age in the mountains and the Twentieth century in our cities. This recognition that time is not linear is particularly strong in Faulkner because he is a baroque writer and because he shares the Baroque with Latin America. He is probably the only Western novelist in the Twentieth century who has the same sense of defeat and loss that we have.

INTERVIEWER

But Faulkner is also recreating a post-agrarian culture.

FUENTES

The passage from an agrarian culture to a post-agrarian

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culture is our own situation, but more than anything Faulkner is a writer of defeat. He is the one American writer who says "We are not only a success story; we are also the history of defeats," and this he shares with us. Latin America is made up of historically and politically failed societies, and this failure has created a subterranean language—since the Conquest. The Baroque in Latin America was the response of the New World to the Old World: it took a form of European culture, the Baroque, and transformed it into a hiding place for Indian culture, for Black culture, for the great syncretism which is the culture of Spanish and Portuguese America. We insert ourselves into that tradition when we write today.

INTERVIEWER

This burden of the past we mentioned earlier is extremely important, isn't it? It creates a heavy load that every Latin American writer has to bear. It also deforms language because every word resounds into the past as well as into the future.

FUENTES

I think it was Allen Tate who disparagingly referred to Faulkner as a Dixie Gongorist, which I think is really the highest praise because it links Faulkner to this culture of the incomplete, of the voracious, of the intertextual which is the Baroque. There is a culture of the Caribbean, I would say, that includes Faulkner, Carpentier, García Márquez, Derek Walcott, and Aimé Césaire, a trilingual culture in and around the whirlpool of the Baroque which is the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico. Think of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

INTERVIEWER

Did you get this sense of cultural perspective as you were growing up or as you were writing?

FUENTES

As I was growing up. Let me explain: a few years ago, a friend of mine, Tito Gerasi, got permission from Jean-Paul Sartre to write his biography. He said, "I have a great idea; I'm going to

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ask Sartre to write down the books he read as a child, and from there I'll see what his intellectual formation was." Later Gerasi came back to me and said, "What are these books, I've never heard of them?" The books Sartre had read as a child were the books we read in the Latin world, which I read as a child: Emilio Salgari, without whom there would be no Italian, French, Spanish, or Latin American literature. Also Michel Zévaco. These authors are part of our tradition but are not part of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. I was lucky because I had both: I read Salgari and Zévaco as well as Mark Twain and Robert Louis Stevenson. Ed Doctorow told me that he became a writer because he read Sabatini, the author of *Captain Blood*. You're invited into such a marvelous world in those books! You are sailing towards that island on a wonderful Spanish galleon! I never want to get off; I want to spend the rest of my life looking for Treasure Island.

INTERVIEWER

But I was wondering if as you grew up you had a sense of somehow representing your culture to other cultures.

FUENTES

I did. Let me tell you another anecdote. I was a Mexican child growing up in Washington in the Thirties. I went to public school, I was popular, as you must be to be happy in an American school, until the Mexican government expropriated foreign-owned oil holdings on March 18, 1938. I became a leper in my school, nobody would talk to me, everyone turned their backs on me because there were screaming headlines every day talking about Mexican communists stealing "our" oil wells. So I became a terrible Mexican chauvinist as a reaction. I remember going to see a Richard Dix film at the Keith Theater in Washington in 1939, a film in which Dix played Sam Houston. When the Alamo came around, I jumped up in my seat shouting "Death to the gringos! ¡Viva México!" When the war started, Franklin Roosevelt organized a meeting in December of 1939 of children from all over the world to speak for peace. I was chosen to represent Mexico and I was dressed as

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a little Mexican *charro* with a big sombrero and I went and made my speech for peace in the name of Mexico.

INTERVIEWER

I asked you about it because you have an objective vision of what Mexico is and at the same time you seem to feel that Mexico is within you.

FUENTES

I am grateful for my sense of detachment because I can say things about my country other people don't say. I offer Mexicans a mirror in which they can see how they look, how they talk, how they act, in a country which is a masked country. Of course, I realize that my writings are my masks as well, verbal masks I offer my country as mirrors. Mexico is defined in the legend of Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, the god who creates man and is destroyed by a demon who offers him a mirror. The demon shows him he has a face when he thought he had no face. This is the essence of Mexico: to discover you have a face when you thought you only had a mask.

INTERVIEWER

Is Stendhal's image of the novel as a mirror moving along a highway ironic for you?

FUENTES

It poses a problem because I don't think literature can content itself with being either a mask or a mirror of reality. I think literature creates reality or it is not literature at all. You have to write "La marquise sortit à cinq heures," to copy the banal details of life, but this is not enough. The mirror is also a way to augment reality; it augments reality or it does nothing.

INTERVIEWER

We seem to have interpolated Alice's mirror here. There is the mirror in which we see ourselves, the mirror we present to others, and the mirror we pass through. But as you grow up this third mirror is frightening.

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FUENTES

It is a neurotic mirror. It's related to desire and to holes. The baroque poet Quevedo is very close to me in my conception of literature as a mirror. For Quevedo the purity of the mirror and the impurity of the asshole are invariably linked. After all, in Spanish, mirror is *espejo*, a *speculum* which contains the word *culo*—asshole. It's the center of the world for Quevedo, the pleasure hole through which you receive and expel desire. So Quevedo can sing of the purity of the reflection in the mirror. I always have him with me in a painting by Cuevas in which he is holding up a mirror saying "look at yourself in this mirror." It's as though the mirror were the mind and the mouth and the eyes which will finally expel reality through the *culo*, the *speculum*. I've always thought this way when thinking about the mirror: the mirror and the latrine are inseparable.

INTERVIEWER

How does the germ of the text take root in your imagination? Where does the subject matter of your work begin?

FUENTES

I think my books are derived from city images, and the city of my dreams or nightmares is Mexico City. Paris or New York just do not stimulate my writing. Many of my stories are based on things I have seen there. The story "The Doll Queen" in *Burnt Water*, for example, is something I saw every afternoon when I was in my teens. There was an apartment house: on the first floor you could see through the windows, and everything was normal. Then at night it was transformed into an extraordinary place full of dolls and flowers, dead flowers and a doll or a girl lying on a bier. I am a city writer and I cannot understand literature outside the city. For me it is Mexico City and its masks and mirrors, the twitchy little images I see when I look at the base of this totem-city, in the mud of the city—the city a space where people move, meet, and change.

INTERVIEWER

I don't mean to ask you a reductive question, but what hooks

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you, what makes you start writing?

FUENTES

That wonderful thing Hamlet says about "a fiction, a dream of passion." My fiction is a dream of passion, born of a cry that says "I am incomplete. I want to be complete, to be enclosed. I want to add something." So *Artemio Cruz*, for example, is a novel of voices. I think literature is born from a voice: you discover a voice and you want to give it a body of paper, but it is the voice that will be the reality of the novel.

INTERVIEWER

You heard Artemio Cruz's voice?

FUENTES

Yes, it was his voice that said, "I am dying in this present. I am a body and I am losing my existence. It is draining out of me." He had a past and was going to die and his memory was going to die. And another voice, the collective voice said, "We will outlive this individual and we will project a world of words with language and memory which will go on." But it was simply a question of many voices meeting in a literary space and demanding their incarnation.

INTERVIEWER

Aura, published in the same year, seems so different from *Artemio Cruz*, so experimental.

FUENTES

Aura is written in the second person singular, the voice poets have always used and that novelists also have a right to use. It's a voice that admits it doesn't know everything, and after all you are a novelist because you don't know everything. Unlike the epic poet who does know everything. Homer knows exactly how doors close and, as Auerbach says, closing a door in Homer takes four verses and the death of Hector takes four verses because they are equally important. But this poetic voice says that we are not alone, that something else accompanies us. In

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writing *Aura*, I was consciously using a particular tradition and without tradition there can be no creation. *Aura* came to me from a great Japanese film, *Ugetsu*. In it, a man goes to war just after he marries a young courtesan, who becomes the purest of wives. When he comes back, he finds she has committed suicide. The town had been taken by some soldiers and in order to avoid rape she killed herself. He goes to her grave and finds her beautiful body perfectly preserved. The only way he can recover her is through an old crone who captures the girl's voice and speaks to him. This is an extraordinary tradition: the old woman with magic powers. Here I insert myself into a tradition that goes back to Faulkner, to Henry James, to Miss Havisham in Dickens, to the countess in Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*, and back to the White Goddess. I'm very much in agreement with Virginia Woolf when she says that when you sit down to write, you must feel the whole of your tradition in your bones, all the way back to Homer.

INTERVIEWER

You also gave voice in *Aura* to a subject not often discussed, Napoleon III's intervention in Mexico, Maximilian and Carlota.

FUENTES

I am obsessed with Carlota: she is one of my ghosts. But my country is a land where the life of death is very important as is the death of life. It is curious that I wrote *Artemio Cruz* and *Aura* at the same time. They complement each other in that *Artemio Cruz* is about the death of life and *Aura* is about the life of death.

INTERVIEWER

The witch in *Aura* is a specific type of woman. What other female images appear in your work?

FUENTES

I've been attacked for depicting very impure women, but this is because of the negative vision my culture has had of

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women. A culture that combines Arabs, Spaniards, and Aztecs is not very healthy for feminism. Among the Aztecs, for example, the male gods all represent a single thing: wind, water, war, while the goddesses are ambivalent, representing purity and filth, day and night, love and hate. They constantly move from one extreme to another, from one passion to another, and this is their sin in the Aztec world. There is a pattern of female ambiguity in my novels.

INTERVIEWER

In this idea of an image of woman created by men, you automatically conjure up movie actresses, and this reminds me of Claudia Nervo in *Holy Place*.

FUENTES

Oh, of course. She would be the supreme example. But last summer I wrote a play about two women, two great symbols of the face in Mexico, María Félix and Dolores del Río. It is called *Orchids in the Moonlight*, from the camp tango in the old Hollywood musical *Flying Down to Rio*. The two women think they are María Félix and Dolores del Río and behave as such, and you might well assume that they are the actresses in exile in Venice until you discover that it is Venice, California, that the women are two *chicanas*, and that nothing is what it seems. But the real faces of the actresses are there, projected on the stage, those incredible faces never aging, because as Diego Rivera once said to them, "Skulls as beautiful as yours never grow old."

INTERVIEWER

In *Holy Place* you deal with the impact of the female on the male: the protagonist, Mito, seems to lose his identity in the presence of his mother. Like Carlota or the witch, she seems to be an extreme feminine type.

FUENTES

No, because I don't think Claudia Nervo is an extreme. On the contrary, it is Mexican men who make an extreme of her.

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She is only defending herself. She is a central figure and the men won't allow women to be central figures; they are banished to the extremes because Mexico is a country where women are condemned to be whores or nuns. A woman is either la Malinche, the Indian who helped Cortés and betrayed her race, or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the nun who divests herself of her voice and her personality, under pressure from religious and political authority. Nowadays in Mexico women are saying they are neither whores nor nuns but many things. They are usurping a role that men have reserved for themselves. Things are changing.

INTERVIEWER

You have seen Mexico undergo a tremendous change, from the Mexico that nationalized the oil fields in 1938 to Mexico today. I assume the society has crumbled the way it has here, that the entire value structure has been transformed. I was wondering how that historical reality enters your very mythical vision of the culture?

FUENTES

In Mexico all these changing realities only point up the fact that there is a tradition, that myths are a tradition, that myths breathe, and that they nourish the epics, the tragedies, and even the melodramas of our contemporary life. Because the society is crumbling, we are in a terrible situation of stock-taking. Mexico, all of Latin America in fact, has been fooled by the illusion of progress. If only we could imitate the United States, France, and Great Britain we could become rich, prosperous, and stable. This has not happened. Suddenly we are in 1980 and we know that in your world too, progress has become an illusion, so now we must look back on our tradition, which is all we really have. Our political life is fragmented, our history shot through with failure, but our cultural tradition is rich, and I think the time is coming when we will have to look at our own faces, our own past—look into this mirror we have been talking about.

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INTERVIEWER

Has Mexican culture fallen the way it has in New York, where money is the only index of worth? Has materialism leveled Mexican society?

FUENTES

No. Your culture has no past; it lives only in the present. Mexico is a culture with many coexisting times. We have a horrible bourgeoisie in Mexico, much worse than yours, a know-nothing bourgeoisie proud of being ignorant. But we also have the majority of the people who have the spiritual value of religion. Ah yes, now it appears that religion, which we have attacked so much in the past, is a cultural value that exists in the depths of Mexico. I mean the sense of the sacred, not Catholic values, the sense that the rabbit can be sacred, that everything can be sacred. If you go to the land of the Tarahumaras you see they don't care a hoot about material things. They care about reenacting the origins, being present at the origins all over again. They find their health in the past, not in the future.

INTERVIEWER

But as you have already shown in your spy novel *The Hydra Head*, Mexico with its vast oil reserves is going to be thrown into the center of things.

FUENTES

Yes. Oil is going to affect the society. I am writing a novel, *Cristóbal Nonato*, that takes place on October 12, 1992, the five-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the New World. I'm wondering what Mexico City and the country will be like then, when we take stock of having been discovered by Europeans five centuries ago.

INTERVIEWER

What is your projection? Don't tell all your secrets, just give us an idea.

FUENTES

Oh, it's a gloomy projection. This is not a science fiction

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novel: there are no gadgets. The story is told by an unborn child and it is what he hears that creates his impression of the world into which he is going to be thrown. The life of Mexico City will almost have been destroyed because you can't have a city of thirty million people with all its physical problems—being high up in the sky, cold, surrounded by mountains that keep the smog down, with water having to be brought from far away, and sewage having to be pumped out. The city will drown in shit; that's what will happen to Mexico.

INTERVIEWER

I can't help thinking of *Terra Nostra*: that novel also takes place in the future, between June and December of 1999. Of course, in that novel your primary concern is the past and your scope is vast.

FUENTES

This is a much more comical novel. Its scope is much more concentrated. The very fact that the narrator is inside his mother's womb limits its possibilities drastically. The information he receives is limited—what he hears and what his genes tell him. I am not trying to do anything like *Terra Nostra*, which is an excursion into Mediterranean culture, into all the worlds we come from, and into the creation of power in our society.

INTERVIEWER

Now that you have given us a glimpse of *Cristóbal Nonato* I wonder if you would mind talking about a text I know of only by hearsay, a book you wrote as a boy in Chile after you left Washington in 1941. Do you remember that book?

FUENTES

I remember it very well. I have always been trapped in a way by English because of living in Washington, so when we moved to Chile I found myself recovering Spanish. That was when I was eleven. Chile at that moment was the country of the great poets—Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda in particular. It was

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also the most politicized country in Latin America. I ended up, of course, in a British school because the British schools in Chile and Argentina were the best. I was promptly dressed up in a blazer, a school tie, and a little grey cap. We did calisthenics at seven a.m. alongside the Andes, got caned, and celebrated allied victories: every time Montgomery won a battle, we had to throw our caps in the air and shout hip, hip, hurrah. There were many budding writers in the school, The Grange it was called: Luis Alberto Heyremans, a playwright now deceased, and both José Donoso and Jorge Edwards, novelists. One of my best friends, who has now become a great Kant scholar, was Roberto Torretti: he and I wrote that novel together. We had many problems because there we were, a Mexican and a Chilean writing a novel that started in Marseilles. Novels had to start in Marseilles because that was where the Count of Monte Cristo made his appearance. Where else could a ship set sail from if not Marseilles with the Château d'If out ahead. The problem, which Dumas did not have, was how to make the people talk: would it be in Mexican or Chilean? We compromised and made them speak like Andalusians. From Marseilles, the novel moved on to Haiti: we had read *Jane Eyre* and were very impressed by mad women in attics. We included a gloomy castle on top of a mountain, Sans Souci—all of this before Alejo Carpentier had written his novel about Haiti, *The Kingdom of this World*. The novel took place there in those gloomy surroundings with mad women chained to their beds and young masters making love to mulatto girls. It went on for about four hundred pages.

INTERVIEWER

Did anyone ever read this Gothic tome?

FUENTES

Not exactly. I read it out loud to David Alfaro Siqueiros the muralist. He was my victim. He had to flee Mexico because he was involved in an assassination attempt on the life of Trotsky. He went to Chile and was painting a bombastic mural in a small town, Chillán, to which Mexico had donated a school after an

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earthquake had destroyed the local school. My father was *Chargé d'Affaires*, and since Siqueiros was not making much money, and depended somewhat on the Embassy, we invited him over quite often. He was a charming man, so after dinner I told him to sit down and listen to my novel. He had no way out. He dozed off, of course, and had a good siesta.

INTERVIEWER

So you combined the English Gothic novel, Dumas, and Salgari?

FUENTES

Yes. It was very dramatic, not at all picturesque. We thought it very gloomy and Brontë-like. We were greatly influenced by Charlotte and Emily Brontë, as was everyone in our group in Chile. Branwell Brontë was the height of decadence for us. You had to be like the Brontës to be good artists.

INTERVIEWER

Those puritans were the height of decadence?

FUENTES

Well, we thought so—the Moors, the hints of incest. Imagine how the Brontës are seen by thirteen-year-olds in Chile in 1942.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write a great deal before publishing?

FUENTES

Yes. When I moved back to Mexico City I was put into a Catholic school—for the first time in my life. We had left Chile and moved to Buenos Aires, but I couldn't stand the schools there—it was the beginning of the Perón period and the fascist influence on education was intolerable. So I demanded to go to Mexico. Alas, when I got there I was put in a Catholic school. The school made me into a writer because it taught me about sin, that everything you did was sinful. So, many things could

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be sins and therefore became so pleasurable that they set me to writing. If things were forbidden, one had to write them, and things are pleasurable if they are forbidden.

INTERVIEWER

Has the idea of sin as a stimulus to writing stayed with you?

FUENTES

Yes. I suppose I started to write *Terra Nostra* in that Catholic school in Mexico City. St. John Chrysostom says that purely spiritual love between a man and a woman should be condemned because their appetites grow so much and lust accumulates. This is an essential point in *Terra Nostra*, where people can never meet in the flesh and have others do the actual fornication for them. I learned a lot in Catholic school.

INTERVIEWER

What brand of Catholicism did you have in Mexico City?

FUENTES

It was a very political Catholicism totally allied to the conservative interpretation of Mexican history. There was a teacher there who would arrive with a calla lily at the beginning of each school year. He would say, "This is a pure Catholic youth before he goes to a dance." Then he would throw the lily on the floor and trample it. After, he would pick up the rag of a lily and say, "This is a Catholic after he goes to a dance and kisses a girl." Then he would throw the flower into the waste basket. They rewrote Mexican history in favor of Maximilian, in favor of Porfirio Díaz, the dictator who precipitated the Revolution, and all images of law and order. I was thrown out of school for a month because I dared to celebrate the birthday of Benito Juárez, the Indian who became president of Mexico, an image of liberalism in our country.

INTERVIEWER

We see how you began to write: how did you decide *what* to write at the beginning of your professional career?

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FUENTES

I decided I had to write the novel of the Mexico I was living. The Mexican novel was locked into certain genres: there were Indian novels, novels of the Revolution, and proletarian novels. For me those were like medieval walls constraining the possibilities of Mexican fiction. The Mexico City I was living in belied those restraints because it was like a medieval city that had suddenly lost its walls and drawbridges and sprawled outside itself in a kind of carnival. You had European nobility stranded in Mexico because of the war, an up-and-coming bourgeoisie, unbelievable bordellos lit up in neon near the fish markets where the smell of the women and the smell of the fish mingled. The writer Salvador Elizondo would go there and slit the prostitutes' armpits while he made love to them so he could make love in a gush of blood. Then mariachi music all night long. Mexico City found in the late Forties and Fifties its baroque essence, a breaking down of barriers, an overflow. I remember dancing the mambo in astounding cabarets and that was the origin of *Where the Air is Clear*: Mexico City as the protagonist of post-Revolutionary life in Mexico. I felt that nothing had been said about that in a novel.

INTERVIEWER

Were there any other writers or artists in your family?

FUENTES

Not particularly: my father was a diplomat, my mother a housewife. My father's brother was an interesting poet, but he died of typhoid at twenty. My great aunt was a sort of Grandma Moses for poetry in Vera Cruz. She wrote about the tropics, the lakes, and the sea, and was quite well known.

INTERVIEWER

Were there any myths about either your uncle or your great aunt that might have created a literary prototype for you?

FUENTES

The only myth was a great-grandmother, Clotilde Vélez

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de Fuentes. She had her fingers cut off by bandits when she was on the stagecoach between Vera Cruz and Mexico City. She wouldn't take off her rings so they chopped off her fingers. She's the only myth I can remember.

INTERVIEWER

How did your family react to your becoming a writer, to your earning a living by writing?

FUENTES

Well, my parents told me to study law because they said I would die of hunger if I tried to live off my writing in Mexico. I also visited the great poet and humanist Alfonso Reyes and he reminded me that Mexico is a very formalistic country and that if I had no title people wouldn't know how do deal with me. "You'll be like a teacup without a handle," he said. I wasn't unhappy about studying law once I began. First, I went to Geneva, my first trip to Europe, where I learned discipline. Back in Mexico I was able to study with great teachers who had fled Spain during the Spanish Civil War. The former dean of the University of Seville, Manuel Pedroso, told me that if I wanted to understand criminal law I should read *Crime and Punishment* and that if wanted to understand mercantile law I should read Balzac, and forget the dreary statutes. He was right, so I immediately found a conjuncture between the social and narrative dimensions of my life. I might have become a corporate lawyer, but I wrote *Where the Air is Clear* instead. What energy I had then: I wrote that novel in four years while finishing law school, working at the University of Mexico, getting drunk every night, and dancing the mambo. Fantastic. No more. You lose energy and you gain technique.

INTERVIEWER

Your second novel quickly followed the first.

FUENTES

My second was actually my first. I was already writing *The Good Conscience*, a more traditional book, when it was washed

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away in the flood of *Where the Air is Clear*. That novel was more than a book for me: it was my life. It made a big splash: it was praised to heaven and damned to hell. One critic said it was only fit to be flushed down the toilet. Now I find to my chagrin that it is required reading for fifteen-year-old girls in the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Mexico City.

INTERVIEWER

So we have the creation of a world which takes on its own shape, a kind of Faulknerian or Balzacian world. Is it still alive?

FUENTES

I've never left it. In the preface I wrote for *Burnt Water*, I mention an imaginary apartment house in Mexico City: Artemio Cruz lives in splendor in the penthouse and Aura the witch lives in the basement. Somewhere in between I have all my other characters. I think I have always been caught in the tension of illusory realism because the realism of these novels is illusory. I hope I am a decent reader of Cervantes, and he, after all, inaugurated realism by casting doubt on reality. This illusory realism is one pole of my writing and the other pole is the fantastic dimension which is extremely real because it takes place in the mind. People think of Balzac merely as a realistic social writer, they forget his fantastic novels. So the lesson of Balzac is deeper for me than appearances would suggest.

INTERVIEWER

You are very much aware of the continuity of your writing.

FUENTES

In a sense my novels are one book with many chapters: *Where the Air is Clear* is the biography of Mexico City; *The Death of Artemio Cruz* deals with an individual in that city; *A Change of Skin* is that city, that society, facing the world, coming to grips with the fact that it is part of civilization and that there is a world outside that intrudes into Mexico. There is a collective psyche in these books which is negated and individualized. But no character speaks alone because there is the

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sense, I hope, that there is a ghost on every page, with every character. All of this culminates in *Distant Relations*, a ghost story about the ghost of literature, about this world as a creation of fiction, a dangerous fiction you are afraid to hand over to the reader. *Distant Relations* is the novel I care most for. It says the most about me as a writer and my interests in literature. It is about writing, the only novel I have ever written about writing.

INTERVIEWER

It hasn't come out in English yet; could you tell us about it?

FUENTES

It is a story told by one character to another who in turn tells it to me, Fuentes. I will not be satisfied until the story is completely told. I must know the whole story, but once I have it I must pass it on to you readers like a gift from the devil. As the title suggests, it is a story about distant relations, about a family in the New World and the Old World whose whole story cannot be told because no text could contain the whole story. It also deals with the influence of France on the Caribbean nations, the ghosts of French writers who came from Latin America, like Lautréamont or Heredia. The novel deals with the origins of fiction, how no story can ever be fully told, how no text can ever be fully exhausted.

INTERVIEWER

Both *Terra Nostra* and *Distant Relations* deal with origins: the first maps out the Mediterranean and Spanish sources of Spanish American culture and the second describes the origin of the literary text, your vain attempt to absorb and express a total history. This desire we see in both novels for a totality of one kind or another reflects one of the common concerns of the novelists of the so-called boom of the Latin American novel during the Sixties. How do you understand this "boom"?

FUENTES

I would say with García Márquez that we are writing one

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novel in Latin America, with a Colombian chapter written by García Márquez, a Cuban chapter written by Carpentier, an Argentine chapter by Julio Cortázar and so on. We live in a continent where the novel is a recent development, where many things have been left unsaid. It is difficult to speak of individuals because a fusion has taken place: characters from *Artemio Cruz* appear in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, while in *Terra Nostra* there are characters from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, from Carpentier's *Explosion in a Cathedral*, Cabrera Infante's *Three Sad Tigers*, and Cortázar's *Hopscotch*. There is a constant intertextuality which is indicative of the nature of writing in Latin America.

INTERVIEWER

So you never felt isolated as a Mexican writer, or that your work was for Mexicans only?

FUENTES

I think I was conscious from the very beginning of my career that it was ridiculous to speak of Mexican literature or Peruvian literature, or Chilean literature, that if we were to have any meaning, any universality it would have to be within the wider range of this tattered, mendicant language we call Spanish.

INTERVIEWER

Some Spanish-American writers have suggested that it was only during the Sixties that they could imagine a readership that extended from Mexico City to Buenos Aires.

FUENTES

This was not the case for me. I founded and directed a lively magazine in the Fifties called *Revista Mexicana de Literatura*, and in 1955, we were publishing Julio Cortázar's early short stories, Cuban poets like Cintio Vitier and José Lezama Lima, even a short story coauthored by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. By the mid-Fifties I felt the traditional barriers had been broken down. The readership was developing at the same time so that there was an intellectual and even a material

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underpinning for the Boom when it appeared. There were publishing houses, distributors, and the authors' knowledge that we belonged to the same linguistic community.

INTERVIEWER

Why were the Sixties so favorable to a communal spirit among the writers?

FUENTES

The Cuban Revolution certainly provided a meeting place. Such fervor and hope were raised by the Cuban Revolution! Havana became a focal point until the Cubans developed their tropical socialist realism and began to excommunicate people. Ultimately they destroyed the possibility of a community, but the Cuban Revolution played a fundamental role in creating a sense of unity. I was there when Castro came into Havana. That was a galvanizing moment in our lives, and retrospectively it still is. An extraordinary thing happened then in the history of Spanish-American literature: everybody prominent in the Boom was a friend of everybody else. Now this has sadly ended. Now that we enter middle age the friendship has broken, and people have become enemies for personal or political reasons. We look back with nostalgia.

INTERVIEWER

Your personal vision of the Boom reminds me of the paucity of biographical and autobiographical materials in the Hispanic world. Only now are we beginning to see writers describing their relation to historical events in Latin America. There are texts like José Donoso's *Personal History of the Boom*, but there is no tradition of memoirs or autobiographies.

FUENTES

I'll tell you why: there is a fear of what is written because it compromises you. I remember arriving at the Mexican embassy in Paris and asking for some information left, I thought, by one of my predecessors. I was interested in his ideas about French politics: it turned out that he never wrote anything because

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some day it might be used against him.

INTERVIEWER

You have mentioned the influence of *Citizen Kane* on *Artemio Cruz*. Have films been important to your writing?

FUENTES

I'm a great moviegoer. The greatest day in my life as a child was when my father took me to New York City to see the World's Fair and *Citizen Kane*, when I was ten years old. And that struck me in the middle of my imagination and never left me. Since that moment, I've always lived with the ghost of *Citizen Kane*. There are few other great movies which I am conscious of when I write. Buñuel's work would be another. Von Stroheim would be another one, especially the great version of *The Merry Widow* he did as a silent film, without the waltzes. Great scenes of love between John Gilbert and Mae Murray, in beds of black sheets, and beautiful women playing the flute and tambourine around them with their eyes blindfolded. And finally when the love comes to a climax, they pull the curtains of the little bed, so they are totally isolated from sight; we are there seeing the absence of sight—a series of reflections unseen and imagined, which I found very powerful. But beyond that I don't view it as an influence.

I think the comedians have influenced everybody, the Marx Brothers are among the greatest artists of the Twentieth century. The greatest anarchists and revolutionaries, and destroyers of property. The people who make the world shriek and explode with laughter and absurdity. I think they have influenced practically everybody. Keaton and Chaplin. But then literature is another thing. It's a verbal process which is very different from the film, very, very different.

INTERVIEWER

Then you don't feel that film will usurp the novel?

FUENTES

I was talking a few months ago in Mexico with one of the

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great film makers of our time, Luis Buñuel. He was eighty years old, and I was asking how he looked back on his career and on the destiny of the film. He said, "I think films are perishable, because they depend too much on technology, which advances too quickly and the films become old-fashioned, antiques. What I hope for is that technology advances to the point that films in the future will depend on a little pill which you take; then you sit in the dark, and from your eyes you project the film you want to see on a blank wall."

INTERVIEWER

Somebody would come along and close your eyes.

FUENTES

Yes, there will be censors. But the film would be projected inside your head, then. They'd have to kill you. It would be the final proof of artistic freedom.

INTERVIEWER

What do you do to promote your own work? Do you submit to talk shows?

FUENTES

Perhaps each nation has the Siberia it deserves. In the Soviet Union a writer who is critical, as we know, is taken to a lunatic asylum. In the United States, he's taken to a talk show. There they have to deal with the NKGB, here they have to deal with Johnny Carson, which is much more withering I suspect. Phillip Roth has said, in comparing his situation to that of Milan Kundera, the Czech writer, that in the United States, everything goes and nothing is important. In Czechoslovakia, nothing goes and everything is important. So this gives the writer an added dimension he doesn't have here.

I was in Paris last year. A book of mine was being launched and they said that I had to go on television. I didn't want to. They said no, no, it sells a lot of books—the program, called *Apostrophes*, is very popular; it's seen by about thirty million people in France. I said, "Okay, let's go and see what hap-

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pens.'' It was a terrifying experience because there was a petulant Frenchman who kept cutting me, so I couldn't express my ideas. He wanted things to go very quickly, and I couldn't say anything. I was very unhappy at what had happened and with what I had said. I went back with Sylvia, my wife, to the apartment. The concierge was waiting up for us and she said, ''Ah, I just turned off the television. How wonderful. It was magnificent, marvelous.'' I said, ''No, it was terrible.It was awful. I didn't like the things I said.'' And she said, ''But Mr. Fuentes, I didn't hear anything you said. I saw you. *I saw you.*'' People who are glued to the television are really in the deepest recess of their soul, hoping to see themselves, because this will be the apotheosis of their identity. Walter Benjamin says a very good thing about the real revolution of the Nineteenth century being the invention of photography. All throughout history, people had been faceless, and suddenly people had a face. The first photographs were kept in jewel boxes lined with velvet because they were precious. They were your identity. Now suddenly you have this possibility of being seen by thirty, forty, fifty million people. You have an identity. You exist. You are someone. No matter how fleetingly, no matter how briefly. Talk about the end of feudalism. There it is. The end of feudalism happens in front of your TV.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever contemplated writing your memoirs?

FUENTES

Oh yes. I want to do that very much when the time comes and I keep lots of interesting notes. I think that in Mexico and Latin America it is a good idea to start thinking of the genre of the memoir, of leaving something, of creating in that genre. My generation has done a great deal to create a narrative tradition and we probably have time to create a memoir tradition. After all, it has existed in the past, in Cortés's letters and in Bernal Díaz del Castillo's personal history of the conquest of Mexico. And now I see this promise in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's book of boyhood in Havana.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think you will continue to write at the same rate you have been?

FUENTES

Well, it has become physically easier for me to write. Time passes and the past becomes the present. What you were living and thought you had lost forever is ancillary to your work. Then suddenly it acquires a shape, it exists in an order of time all its own and this order of time demands a literary form. So then these presences of the past are there in the center of your life today. You thought they were unimportant or that they had died, but they have just been looking for their chance. If you try to force a theme when you are twenty-five and have lived less, you find you can't do a thing with it. Suddenly it offers itself gratuitously. At fifty I find there is a long line of characters and shapes demanding words just outside my window. I wish I could capture all of them, but I won't have enough time. The process of selection is terrifying because in selecting you necessarily kill something.

INTERVIEWER

This is a fantastic image, a double apprenticeship: an initial phase of writing being itself a gestation period followed now by a period of painful plenitude.

FUENTES

When your life is half over, I think you have to see the face of death in order to start writing seriously. There are people who see the end quickly, like Rimbaud. When you start seeing it, you feel you have to rescue these things. Death is the great Maecenas, Death is the great angel of writing. You must write because you are not going to live any more.

—**Alfred MacAdam**
Charles Ruas

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Wachtmann's Cubes

James Fetler

6:40 A.M.

Wachtmann glared at the parrot and tried to recapture the chords he had seen in his dream. He kicked off his blankets. The cloth had slipped from the top of the cage and hung down like a tongue. Beckmesser was rattling his throat and adjusting his wings. His right eye was completely closed now.

Wachtmann pushed himself out of the bed. He threw the plastic cup into the trash bag and limped to the window. Again the window was stuck. The fog sliced off the top half of Telegraph Hill, as though someone had pulled down a shade. He could hear the foghorns on San Francisco Bay. Downstairs in the kitchen Tsugami was chopping the kidneys for the cat. Wachtmann put all his weight on the frame. The window came down with a crash. Tsugami stopped chopping.

He climbed on the stool and unfastened the cloth from the cage. When he offered Beckmesser the tip of his finger, the par-

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rot retreated one hop. Another long rattle. It was not a good rattle. Wachtmann listened. The rattle was bad. He climbed down from the stool and limped over to the table. As Beckmesser got worse, he seemed to be expanding in some curious way. Filling up more of the room. Wachtmann picked up the pen. Once again, he was seeing the chords he had seen in his dream, an arrangement of cubes. Beckmesser lifted one foot and the cubes changed their shape. Wachtmann set the pen down. Tsugami was chopping again.

6:56 A.M.

He adjusted the straps around his legs. The ache in his joints came and went, as though someone were twisting a dial. When you strain for the notes, they don't come; when you finally give up, they slide back in the dead of the night. The cat in the kitchen was crying for meat. Wachtmann counted the splats as the kidney chunks hit the linoleum.

Again a long rattle.

Maybe Beckmesser had picked up a virus from the cat. Cats carried toxic dust in their fur. Every night he could hear the cat growling about in the corridors, clawing the carpets, then crouching and scratching at things as Tsugami worked the sewing machine in the bedroom and assaulted his ears with her infernal Hokkaido laments.

He forced himself into the green uniform that Finley had issued to him. A man couldn't work in this house any more: cats and sewing machines and Tsugami's flat, sorrowful face. The shirt was stiff with starch. The zipper on the pants seemed to be stuck. Finally it gave. The legs of the pants were four inches too long. As he was rolling up the pants he could see the cubes starting to surface again, coming out of the little gas heater, but before he could get to his desk Beckmesser hopped to the left and they sank out of sight.

7:10 A.M.

Tsugami was wiping her hands on a towel when he limped down the stairs with the Cannonball manual in his hand. She

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had painted her eyelids again and was wearing that blouse he had bought her a couple of years ago, when she took him to see *Turandot* at the Opera House. He could hear the TV in the living room: voices without human tones. She folded the towel. "I keep reminding you about that window. You don't listen to me."

"Fix the window," he said.

"You'll break the glass one of these days." She went into the kitchen. "You've broken enough things already around here." She hesitated. "Breakfast."

"No breakfast. And keep the door closed to my room."

She stood before the stove, her back to him. "Eat an egg."

"No eggs." This impossible woman. He had given as much as he could. There was no more to give.

"You can't start a new job without something inside—you are not a young man." She poured him some coffee. "Something more than that stuff you were drinking last night. I can smell it from here."

"I don't need any eggs. All I need is some privacy and peace."

She did a thing with her neck, like a chicken. "It'll happen again—you are going to tear yourself down." She set the cup on the counter. "I don't know why you're doing these things. I have stood behind you for five years. Why are you treating me like this?"

He went to the front door, the Cannonball manual rolled up in his hand. She followed him. "What did I do to you?" She waited. "Are you thinking of moving out again?"

"The cat," he warned, pushing Tsugami aside. "The house is full of toxic dust." He went out into the fog.

8:05 A.M.

Finley was dragging the tire display from the lube room to the front of the station. The transistor radio in the office was giving the traffic report: heavy flow southbound on the Golden Gate Bridge. The Cannonball sign floated high in the fog.

"You're early," the manager grunted, dragging the tire display to the pumps. He glanced at the manual. "How'd it

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go?''

Wachtmann handed him the manual. ''I can't follow the technical terms. There is no glossary.'' He put his hands in his pockets. ''This uniform is too big.''

Finley took the manual into the office and came out dragging a rack filled with oil additives. ''They don't come any smaller than that—it's the best I could do. You're awfully short, you know. Come in here for a minute.''

They went into the lube room. Wachtmann glanced around: a worktable with wrenches and ratchets. Against the wall, a pegboard with fan belts. Radiator hoses.

''We've got to take count,'' Finley said, tearing open a carton. Fuses. He handed him a pencil. Someone had been chewing on it. ''Write this down.''

''There was no listing of terms,'' Wachtmann said. ''What is *torque*?''

Finley studied the carton of fuses, as though trying to remember what they were. ''I'll tell Harry to give you a hand.''

Wachtmann noticed the manager's hair. It was brittle and thin, but carefully styled. There were two boils on the back of his neck. ''The manual kept referring to *torque*.''

''Wait a minute,'' Finley said. ''What happened to your cap?''

Wachtmann's hand went to his head. Suddenly he was tasting last night's rum. It felt like a clot in the back of his throat.

''Didn't I issue you a cap?''

''You didn't give me a cap.''

Finley went to the back room, where the employees had their lockers, and returned with a green baseball cap. It bore the Cannonball emblem in crimson and black. The cap slid over Wachtmann's ears like a helmet.

''I am not a mechanic,'' Wachtmann said. ''I explained that to you.''

''Right. That's right.''

''I told you I'm willing to learn. But I can't be expected to—''

''Well, that's right.'' The manager kept nodding. Why was he nodding like that, with the boils on the back of his neck? ''I'm trying to help. You'll do fine.'' His eyes changed their

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shape. A Dodge van with a CB antenna coasted up to the pumps. "I'm really trying to help. I can see things in you."

8:11 A.M.

Wachtmann was pulling the nozzle out of the van when Harry roared up on his Honda. A beefy boy with red hands. He climbed off the bike. "Well, hello." He unzipped his ski jacket. "That cap's kind of big, isn't it?"

Wachtmann began cleaning the windshield. He strained, but he couldn't reach the top of the glass. The CB radio was crackling. The braces cut into his thighs.

"Keep an eye on him, Harry," the manager said. "Show him how everything works."

Wachtmann ran the credit card through the printer. He limped to the front of the van and wrote down its license. On the bumper: I FOUND IT! The CB radio made peculiar squawks as the driver sat back and stared into the fog.

Harry led Wachtmann into the lube room. "You've got to learn to solicit," he said.

Wachtmann looked up at him.

"*Solicit*," Harry said. "Look here." He pulled on one of the drawers. Wiper blades. "The gas sells itself. There's no problem with gas. What you've got to do, you've got to push these here blades, and the pressure caps and hoses and plugs, things like that. You've got to remind people their hoses and blades need replacing. It's a service to them. You don't want them driving around in the fog with worn-out wiper blades." He pulled a card from his shirt pocket and held it in front of Wachtmann's eyes: TEN SURE-FIRE WAYS OF INCREASING YOUR SALES IN A HURRY.

Finley stepped into the lube room. "All set?"

Harry slipped the card back in his pocket. "We were waiting for you."

Finley's eyes changed their shape. Wachtmann tried to ignore the transistor radio—a ballad about a diesel truck cutting through Kansas in the middle of the night. It wasn't clear if the singer was a woman or a man.

"All right," Finley said. "Let's just take a look over here."

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He pushed a red button marked UP and the grease rack clattered up, but with hitches, as though something in the mechanism were starting to slip, and in the back room the compressor began hissing out air, and the rack shivered and froze, less than two feet from the floor.

"It's stuck," Harry said. His hands hung at his sides. "That's as high as she goes."

Wachtmann stared at the rack. Finley scrunched himself down to his size. "It's been freezing like that for a week and a half, and it's costing us big revenue. Every day I lose out on at least eight, nine lubes. Half a dozen oil changes. It really adds up. I keep waiting for the maintenance crew to come in and repair it—"

"They're on strike," Harry said.

"They're on strike?"

"Might take weeks."

"Either I wait, or I find a good man who can work at that height without breaking his back."

Wachtmann backed away from the rack.

"That's why I need somebody, uh, small."

"You didn't mention the rack," Wachtmann said.

"Well, it's perfectly safe. It's just cramped under there."

"You knew I was desperate for money! You told me—"

"Hold on!" Finley said. "Settle down!"

"My parrot is sick! The landlady sucks my soul dry! Toxic dust in the air! You're taking advantage of me!"

Finley lowered his voice. "I'm not taking advantage of you! What do you mean, I'm taking advantage of you? You think I'm in love with these pumps? You've had some bad times. Fine. You think you're alone? You need money? Everybody needs money! I'm putting my woman through school! What the hell are you talking about?"

The bell rang. Wachtmann limped out to the pumps. Harry followed. "I don't think that was right. He's really trying to help. He told me. He said he sees something special in you."

Wachtmann was silent.

"What's the matter with your legs?" Harry asked.

"Braces."

"How come?"

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"A disease."

9:50 A.M.

The first lube job was a Chevy wagon with scratches on its doors and a wire compartment for dogs. Finley pushed the UP button and the rack shivered and froze at the usual place. They slid underneath. Finley drained the oil into a pan and explained about the fittings. "Here. Here. Over here. This one here. Back in there." He shifted his position. "All right. Let's get the oil filter off."

Wachtmann reached for the filter. It was hot.

"Not like that," Finley said. He handed him the filter wrench. "Always use the right tool."

As Wachtmann was slipping the wrench around the filter he caught a glimpse of the cubes. He yanked.

"Not so hard," Finley said. "Take it slow. It'll come." He squirmed out from under the grease rack and went to the office.

"It's stuck!" Wachtmann called out.

"Just go slow. It'll come." He was working an adding machine. "What's with your parrot, anyway?"

"He's sick."

"I know he's sick. What's the matter with him?"

"Toxic dust from the cat."

"Then get rid of the cat."

"The cat isn't my cat."

"I'd get rid of the cat anyway." More computations on the adding machine. "Why did you leave Amsterdam?"

"I completed my studies at the Conservatory."

"I mean why didn't you stay where you were?"

Wachtmann looked at the grime on his knuckles. "The desire for success."

Finley started tapping his feet. "What else did you study—besides the piano?"

"Composition."

"What else?"

"I didn't—" He yanked on the wrench and the filter was suddenly loose. The oil flowed over his hands, down his wrists.

Finley came out of the office and knelt down. "Oh boy!" He

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threw him a rag. "It's okay. Don't worry about it."

"I need another cloth."

Finley threw him another. "There you go."

Wachtmann wiped the oil from his hands. Finley watched. He was crouching on all fours. "My shirt is a mess," Wachtmann said. "Look at these sleeves!"

Finley kept looking at him thoughtfully.

"What is it?" Wachtmann asked.

"You look like a character out of a play," Finley said. "All you need is a knife."

Wachtmann was silent.

"I'm really intrigued by the stage," Finley said.

"I haven't been to the theater in years."

"It's an unusual world," Finley said. "It gets right to the point."

6:12 P.M.

As they were both washing up, Finley announced he would buy him a quick cup of coffee at the corner cafeteria. His wife Emma was waiting for him—they were going to a party—and she'd certainly want to meet the new man on the team. Emma, he said, was a people-person. She liked people. She liked to cultivate new friends. She was going into social welfare work and meeting people was one of her natural gifts.

The manager handed him a bundle wrapped in brown paper. Clean uniforms. "That's as small as they come, I'm afraid. Maybe you can get your landlady to alter them." He began changing his clothes. "They might shrink in the wash. I don't know. You can leave your cap here."

Wachtmann stared at the front of his shirt. "No coffee tonight. I'm too tired and Beckmesser needs food."

"You're pretty fond of your parrot, aren't you?"

"He brings me both comfort and grief."

Finley slipped into an embroidered Mexican peasant blouse. Instead of buttons it had pegs. "I'll drop you off at your place on the way to the party."

"Some other night."

"One quick cup."

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6:18 P.M.

The cafeteria smelled of floor wax and stew, and the faded photomurals of San Francisco were covered with miscellaneous notices. An elderly busboy with knots in his shoestrings was reading a religious tract in the corner. Two Yellow Cab drivers were sitting opposite each other, spooning clam chowder into their mouths. Directly behind them was Emma, a redheaded woman with an attaché case.

Emma had a bright smile and thick bones. Genuine. As Finley went to the counter for coffee, she gave Wachtmann an amusing account of the statistics exam she had struggled with that morning. Her eyes fluttered like valves. Statistics were certainly strange, she observed. They reminded her of hired hit men. Wachtmann agreed that statistics were strange.

Finley returned with the coffee and picked up the sugar dispenser. "So how'd it go?" He let the sugar flow into his cup in a long steady stream.

She described the statistics exam.

Finley shook his head. "Sophistry." He handed the sugar dispenser to Wachtmann. "It's almost over now. She's got one more semester to go."

Wachtmann folded his hands. "Then you'll have your degree?"

Emma smiled.

"An accomplishment," Wachtmann said.

"He was there every step of the way," Emma said, removing a strand of thread from Finley's sleeve. "He's been very supportive."

Finley lowered his eyes. Emma picked up her cup. There was something between them. Wachtmann wanted to leave.

"Feel like talking?" Finley asked. His eyes were still aimed at the floor.

Wachtmann blinked at him.

Emma gave Wachtmann's hand a light pat. "Don't take him too seriously. He gets into soul-searching at the end of the day—he says it's his dramatic instinct."

Finley leaned forward. "Something happened to you."

"Something happened to me?"

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"You're a gifted man. It shows in your eyes. I can see it in your hands."

Wachtmann slipped his hands under the table.

"That's right," Finley said. "You were trained at the Conservatory. The day you came in with the want ad I found myself thinking: *Something's happened to him. He needs help.*"

"Everybody needs help," Wachtmann said.

"Why the pumps?"

"It's a job."

"It might help if you talked about it."

Emma seemed to be backing away silently.

Wachtmann stared at the large photomural, but instead of the mural he saw Beckmesser staring at him with his single good eye.

He spoke quickly, the way people speak when they want to disentangle themselves. He described the early recitals in Amsterdam, the minor successes, the move to New York and its neighborhood orchestras, the gradual typecasting, the shift to L.A. and the slippage as he bounced from one film studio to the next, and then the live TV shows and the cocktail lounges and the pizza parlors that needed a piano for their Buster Keaton flicks. He didn't mention his daughter or wife, or the bottles of rum, or the last sullen years under Tsugami's roof.

"When the disease of the bone settled in, I could no longer play properly."

"I've been watching your eyes," Finley said. "You're still fighting to be what you are." He turned to Emma. "He hasn't sold out."

"What are you doing these days?" Emma asked.

"I've been trying to compose."

"Any luck?"

"I see chords in my mind. They have different shapes. The ideas are hard to get down." He slapped the top of his head. Again, there was Beckmesser's eye. "Everything has to come out of here."

"You must've had some kind of medical coverage," Emma said. For a moment she sounded professional.

Wachtmann shook his head. "I was negligent about practi-

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cal things. I felt I was beyond such concerns."

"That was very unfortunate," Emma said.

"I regret it today."

"Sit tight," Emma said. "Be right back." She arose and went ponderously to the rest room. The busboy nodded to her.

"A good woman," Wachtmann said.

"Well, she has a good heart," Finley said. "She'll do well in her field. She is really sincere."

Wachtmann thought of his wife. An elaborate machine. Gears and springs.

"Emma's practical," Finley said. "I'm like you. You may find that hard to believe. I saw it right away. We have a lot in common. She's got both of her feet on the ground. I want to get the hell out of this job. She keeps reminding me about all the years I've invested in Cannonball Gas—and she's right. I can move up to a desk job pretty soon. They think very highly of me."

"You're a good manager."

"The economy is bad," Finley said. "We were talking about it last night. Jobs are terribly scarce."

"Very scarce," Wachtmann said.

"It's depressing."

When Emma returned from the rest room her hands were still wet. "No towels. George said they ran out." She bent over Wachtmann protectively. "You're coming to the party with us."

"Not tonight," Wachtmann said.

"Well, it's very informal. Just some friends. You've got to have something to eat."

"The landlady gives me my meals."

Finley got out of his chair. "I promised to drive him home."

"You're not eating enough," Emma said. She took Wachtmann's hand. "Come along."

6:44 P.M.

Wachtmann slid around on the cluttered back seat of Finley's Volvo wagon. Torn theater magazines, a crepe-soled shoe, playbills, *The Chronicle*. At his feet was a cardboard

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model of a set: a four-poster on a platform and a hidden door, made to look like a part of the wall, and some steps going down. The four-poster was coming apart.

Emma noticed him looking at it. "He's so good with his hands."

"An original design."

"He's made dozens of them."

Finley shifted to second. They were starting to climb a steep hill. "*The Madwoman of Chaillot.*"

"He enjoys making sets," Emma said.

Wachtmann leaned forward. "You've made dozens of these?"

"Watch the hill," Emma said.

7:03 P.M.

He clutched at his bundle and bowed to the hostess, a benign-looking woman in a t-shirt and jeans. Finley had disappeared down the hall. As Emma led Wachtmann to the buffet table she introduced him around. Her friends worked with ghetto children, with the aged, with addicts, with the indigent in Hunter's Point. One woman specialized in therapy for the deaf. Emma loaded food on his plate. He withdrew to a corner and proceeded to eat.

Emma went to the kitchen. On the couch slumped a girl with a very sweet face, like the face of a child, but her voice was all wrong for such delicate eyes. Emma reappeared with a tumbler of wine. Wachtmann thought of Tsugami's incessant haranguing about the rum bottles he brought to his room. He accepted the wine.

"I'll get you more herring," she said.

"I've had plenty of herring," he said.

She sat down. "I want him to be a success. I want him to be happy. You understand that."

Wachtmann nodded and tasted the wine.

"He isn't happy," she said. She paused. "There's a shadow on him. You notice how he withdraws."

"A shadow?"

"He keeps yearning for things he can't have."

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Wachtmann was silent.

"You've heard him yourself. He keeps talking about that theatrical world. We buy season tickets. It isn't enough. He would like to design and direct."

"He has gifts."

"It's becoming an obsession with him."

"He's ambitious."

"He's out of his head. He has no formal training. It'd take him years to get anywhere. There's no work to be had. Where is he going to direct? *Who* is he going to direct? Qualified people with years of experience are looking for jobs. They've got no place to go. They end up pumping gas. Look at you."

"It's a dilemma," he said.

"Try to eat." She pushed herself up and went back to her friends.

Wachtmann listened to them. Laughter and exclamations, as though someone were stirring the room with a ladle. He glanced out the window. An oil tanker seemed to be nailed to the middle of the bay. Alcatraz was aglow. Maybe he should have phoned Tsugami. A cable car clanged down the street and tipped itself over the hill. She was not a bad woman. He felt sorry for her. Tsugami had always been patient and long-suffering. But he didn't like feeling indebted to her. She'd assured him there would be no strings if he stayed without paying any rent. That was three years ago, and he'd kept himself free of her pressures and hooks. The woman thrived on rebuffs. She solicited them. Did he have to come home to her steamed vegetables every night? Let her wait.

He watched as a striking young couple appeared side by side, the woman's ash-blonde hair in a single long braid down her back. Her partner had very deep eyes and looked Lebanese. Maybe Egyptian. Wachtmann followed the woman with his eyes as he finished the wine. He tried catching the sound of her voice, but there was too much noise. He went to the kitchen for more wine.

8:47 P.M.

No more Chianti, he reminded himself as he walked care-

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fully down the hall to the bathroom. The bathroom was occupied. He turned into the study. Finley was lying on the couch. His eyes were closed and he was balancing a half-empty glass on his chest. The radio was on. Wachtmann listened: *Woyzeck*, the last scene. Against the wall stood an old upright. Someone had repainted it in rainbow colors. Wachtmann sat down on the hassock and listened to the *Woyzeck*.

When the opera was over, Finley sat up and exhaled. "I was wondering how long you could take it out there."

"They're good people," Wachtmann said.

"Yes, they are."

Wachtmann went to the bathroom.

9:02 P.M.

When he returned to the study he saw that Finley had brought a second glass. He was unscrewing the cap from the bottle of bourbon. The radio was off.

"I saw a striking blonde woman out there," Wachtmann said. "The one with the braid. Do you know who she is?"

"How would I know who she is?" Finley handed him his glass. "I've been in here all night."

"She came with a dark man. Egyptian."

"I don't know who she is."

"She reminded me of my wife," Wachtmann said.

Finley looked surprised, as though he were seeing Wachtmann from a different perspective.

They drank.

9:40 P.M.

"You haven't said anything about your wife," Finley said.

"There is nothing to say," Wachtmann could hear the toilet flushing. "She climbed up, I slid down."

"What is she doing these days?"

"Los Angeles Philharmonic. First chair."

"That's pretty good."

"That's very good."

They drank silently for a while.

"How long were you married?" Finley asked.

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"Less than two years."
"How long have you been living alone?"
"A long time." Tsugami didn't count.
"Was she unfaithful?"
"I don't know. I don't think so."
They drank.
"You did bad things to her?" Finley asked.
Wachtmann didn't reply.
"Why?" Finley asked.
"I don't know."
"You're a frustrated man," Finley said.

10:06 P.M.

Finley's voice had grown cold. "You abuse women who love you. Correct?"
Wachtmann tried to ignore him.
"Did you have any kids?" Finley asked.
"A girl."
"How old is your daughter?"
"Twelve, thirteen." He looked up at the ceiling. "She's thirteen."
Finley was twisting one of the pegs on his Mexican blouse. He talked into his glass. "Well, you can't blame your wife."
"I have never blamed my wife."
"Women need consideration," Finley said. "A woman has to have respect. She can't be treated like—"
"My wife had plenty to object to," Wachtmann agreed.
"Well, I imagine she did."
"She objected to failure," Wachtmann said. He wiggled his glass. "And to this."

11:10 P.M.

"Play something for me," Finley said.
Wachtmann wiped his mouth. "I can't play."
Finley shuffled out to the hallway and brought in a chair and placed it in front of the gaudy piano. "Go on. Play."
Wachtmann's forefinger struck a chipped key. "It won't come any more. I pushed everything else to the side." He sat

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down at the keyboard. The bright colors were hurting his head. "I can't get it to come."

"You can play," Finley said.

Wachtmann struck a soft chord. Then another. He eased himself into fragments—loose ends. Finley took the high-intensity lamp from the desk and set it on top of the upright. He plugged it in.

"I don't need the lamp," Wachtmann said.

Finley switched on the light. Wachtmann saw his hands dipping into the circle of white.

As he played he found himself edging again toward the cubes he had seen in his dream. He heard Beckmesser's rattle. He stopped and rubbed his fingers together. Again he went after the cubes. They broke off as the rattle increased. The manager sat down next to him on the hassock. He was holding his head in his hands. Wachtmann went back to the cubes. His knuckles were blue against the white of the keys. He could see the cubes clearly, to the left of the parrot. Beckmesser was working his talons. Wachtmann closed his eyes. As he struggled to fix the true shape of the cubes he heard voices behind him. Emma was in the hallway with some of her friends. They were discussing legislative reforms in Sacramento. The parrot cocked his head. The piano turned dead. The cubes slid out of sight.

Wachtmann stood up. Finley's eyes seemed inflamed. "Are you coming to work in the morning?"

Wachtmann steadied himself against the piano. "I don't know."

"Cannonball doesn't satisfy me," Finley said.

Wachtmann picked up his bundle. "You're looking for something to satisfy you?"

11:32 P.M.

He started limping downhill to Columbus Avenue. The braces cut into his flesh. The bundle kept changing its shape in his arms.

North Beach tangled itself around him. He felt he was pushing through kelp. Young men were roaming about. The

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topless nightclubs were like smoking machines. He limped past a middle-aged man in a green leisure suit who was arguing with his wife. They were standing in front of an Adult Theater, and she was tired and wanted to go home, and he was angry because she was tired. Wachtmann felt dizzy, as though her weariness had gone into him. The woman said, *Go watch the show by yourself and I'll take a cab home*, and her husband said, *Man, that's so typical of you!*

Wachtmann was halfway across Columbus Avenue before he realized that he was walking against the light. A car filled with Chinese youths slammed on its brakes. A truck blasted him with its horn.

12:08 A.M.

As he was turning the corner that led to Tsugami's, he heard a low hissing behind him. He limped up the hill. All his life, since the earliest years, he had struggled for silence and space, but his privacy had brought him no peace. A street-cleaning truck spraying water drove past, its brushes revolving, sucking up dirt and debris.

His feet echoed on the stone steps leading to the front door. He pulled out his key and groped for the lock. The lock kept twisting away from his hand.

He was securing the chain on the front door when she came out of her room in her quilted white robe. Her black hair hung down like a hood. He had almost forgotten the way it hung down when she took out the pins. The cat pattered out of the kitchen, looked around, and withdrew.

Her face was like a sheet of paper. "Take a look at yourself."

He started to climb the stairs. He would deal with Tsugami in the morning. It had happened enough times before. He would eat some of her steamed vegetables and she'd leave him alone for a while.

"Why are you doing these things?"

He stopped, then continued on to the top of the stairs. The cubes were somewhere up there, in his room. He opened the door and climbed up on the stool and peered into the cage. Beckmesser stared back at him.

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A Note on the Type

Ray Russell

The text of this book was set, via computer-driven cathode ray tube, in a film version of 12 point Sophonisba, a typeface designed by A(rthur) A(delbert) Rawling for the Bald Eagle Linotype Company of Evanston, Illinois, in 1929. Due to the financial crisis of that year, the Bald Eagle Company went out of business before the typeface could be used, and its peculiar graces lay dormant all these decades, to be appreciated by the world for the first time only now. The unabashed scimitar-sweep of its serifs was Rawling's contemptuous response to the proliferating use of sans serif typefaces, "which the eye slides off like a buttered noodle off a fork," he said. "They are the beloved of undergraduates, anarchists, sexual deviates, jazz babies and nincompoops—terms I consider synonymous."

Rawling died in 1966 and therefore never knew the pleasure of seeing a book set in the typeface he designed with such artistry and love, and which he named after his wife, the former Sophonisba Blunt, daughter of General Horatius ("Stone-

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head'') Blunt, veteran of the Mexican border wars, and author of *A Plain Blunt Man*, his unpublished memoirs. Sophonisba was a lyric poet in her own right, who garnered a small regional reputation as The Sweet Warbler of Forest Park (a suburb of Chicago) and who published several volumes of her verse which she printed herself in 24 point Aesthetic on a small hand press in the basement of her parents' house.

Her father named her after Hannibal's sister, daughter of Hasdrubal, and the subject of James Thomson's once popular tragedy, in which occurs a famous line that has long been the butt of mockery: ''Oh, Sophonisba! Sophonisba, oh!'' General Blunt wrote of that line: ''Absurd it may be (both Fielding and Dr. Johnson ridiculed it), and yet on the lips of a fine declamatory actor, it can shred the heart. I do not approve of the substitution, 'Oh, Sophonisba, I am wholly thine'—it lacks the ungirt emotion of the original.'' Sophonisba Blunt Rawling was known as Sophie to almost everyone, including her mother and her husband, but excluding her father, who invariably addressed and referred to her by the long form of her Christian name. ''What's in a name?'' he rhetorically asked in his autobiography, and rhetorically replied, ''Not very much, perhaps, but what little there is should be granted its full value. Was Alexander the Great known as Alex, Julius Caesar as Julie, Napoleon as Nappie? No: but when, in our democratic slackness, we reduce our great men to cronies by disrespectfully calling them *Ben* Franklin, *Abe* Lincoln, *Teddy* Roosevelt, we do great harm to them and to ourselves. I would as lief call our present chief executive 'Cal' as I would refer to the King Jim Bible. Thankful I am that I was christened Horatius, a name that does not easily lend itself to diminutives.'' For that very reason, however, his schoolmates, from kindergarten through West Point, blighted his life with the greeting, ''Goodness gracious, here's Horatius!'' and invented a number of sobriquets of which the least offensive was ''Stonehead,'' sometimes spoken in variants such as ''The Great Stone Head'' (inspired by Nathaniel Hawthorne's story of nearly that title) or ''Big Chief Stonehead'' or ''Herr Doktor Steinkopf.'' The ''Big Chief'' appellation was not entirely inappropriate,

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because the General was reputed to be one-fourth Cherokee, which his flinty facial features seemed to confirm. He always insisted that the nickname "Stonehead" was a tribute to his stoic, chiseled, noble Cherokee profile, and was by no means to be misconstrued as a disparagement of his mental powers.

General Blunt disapproved of his son-in-law because the latter would not, or could not, assist him in getting his memoirs published. No matter how often Rawling protested that he was a type designer, not an editor, and that Bald Eagle was a Linotype firm, not a publishing house, the General persisted in his belief that Rawling had "connections" in the world of books but was perversely and maliciously denying his father-in-law the benefit of them. This he found "sharper than a dragon's tooth," misquoting Lear, a character with whom he strongly identified. The animosity between Sophonisba's husband and father was remarkable in view of the fact that they both held staunchly conservative opinions and voted the straight Republican ticket. Sophonisba, torn by her love for both men and suffering from each man's muttered slurs against the other (Rawling called her father "General Nuisance," while the General called her husband "Crawling," "Sprawling," and, even worse, Adelbert), hoped to reconcile their differences by naming her son after both of them—Horatius A. A. Rawling—but the boy turned out to be a girl who, moreover, was stillborn, a sad event which the General irrationally blamed on his son-in-law's "dubious virility" (?!).

As the General lay dying, he entreated his daughter to bury the manuscript of *A Plain Blunt Man* with him; but she disobeyed and, after his death, mailed it, over a period of years, to dozens of publishers, all to no avail. Most of them sent it back with impersonal rejection slips; one offered to turn it over to a team of radio gag-writers who could "punch it up" and thus "bring out the comedy more." Finally, she was driven by a determination to print the book herself, on the little press on which she had hitherto printed her poetry. Painstakingly, she set the type manually, letter by separate letter, in 36 point Perpetua Bold. After printing the first twenty-eight pages on

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large sheets of fine rice paper (from which the above extracts were taken), she died. Her grieving husband kept those pages, "for they were printed by her own dear hands," but joyously burned the full manuscript of General Blunt's life story. We can only guess, by its printed table of contents, what manner of book went up in smoke thanks to Rawling's attack of *Schadenfreude*: "Pre-Natal Memories," "Precocious Paulette, or The Little Girl Who Lived in the Lane," "How a Swine Named Edison Stole My Ideas," "Army Field Rations: A Bolshevist Plot?" and "Thoughts on Reincarnation: Did Bacon Write *Hamlet*, or Did I?" are just a few of the chapter headings. It is believed that Rawling also burned a full-figure oil rendering of the General, painter unknown, showing him in toga and sandals, holding a scroll, and crowned with laurel.

This book was composed by Alpha Graphic Services of Wilmington, Delaware, and printed and bound by The Passworthy Press of Nashville, Tennessee. The unusual binding design is by Carlotta Culp-Frazier, a name that will live in infamy.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Julio Cortázar, an Argentine born in Brussels in 1914, has lived and worked in Paris since 1952. He is a poet, translator and amateur jazz musician, as well as the author of several novels and volumes of short stories. Those books of his published in English include *Hopscotch*, *A Manual for Manuel*, and *A Change of Light*. The pieces appearing in this issue have been selected from *A Certain Lucas*, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf. **Gregory Rabassa** teaches at Queens College and the Graduate School at CUNY. He won the National Book Award for his translation of *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar. He has also translated the works of Gabriel García Márquez, Osman Lins, Aguilera-Malta and Luis Rafael Sánchez.

James Fetler's collection of short stories, *Impossible Appetites*, won the 1980 Iowa School of Letters Short Fiction Award. Subsequently, the book received the Commonwealth Club of California's Gold Medal for Best Fiction of 1980. Mr. Fetler is also a recipient of an NEA Fellowship. He teaches at Foothill College in California.

Jamaica Kincaid, born in St. Johns, Antigua, is currently living in New York City.

Gordon Lish's *Dear Mr. Capote* will be published in the fall of 1982. His other books include *The Secret Lives of Our Times* (Doubleday) and *All Our Secrets Are the Same* (Norton). He teaches fiction writing at Yale and Columbia.

R. D. Pohl was educated at SUNY-Buffalo where he has also done graduate work in both philosophy and English. This is his first published short story.

Ray Russell is the author of more than a dozen books, including his ongoing *Summerfield Saga*: *Princess Pamela* (1979) and *The Bishop's Daughter* (1981), both published by Houghton Mifflin.

Joy Williams is the author of two novels, *State of Grace* (Paris Review/Doubleday) and *The Changeling*. Her forthcoming collection, *Taking Care and Other Stories* will be published this spring by Random House. This is her sixth story in *The Paris Review*.

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POETRY

Richard Howard's translation of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* will be published next spring by David Godine. Mr. Howard's most recent collection of poems is *Misgivings* (Atheneum).

Random House will publish **Stephen Mitchell**'s *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke* next fall. Mr. Mitchell, who lives in Berkeley, California, is also the author of *Out of the Whirlwind*, a version of the Book of Job.

INTERVIEWS

Alfred MacAdam teaches Latin American literature at the University of Virginia. His most recent book, *Modern Latin American Narrative: The Dreams of Reason*, was published by University of Chicago Press.

Charles Ruas is a contributing editor at the *Soho News*, has done literary interviews for *The Paris Review* and the *New York Times*, and is currently finishing a book on contemporary trends in American fiction.

Peter H. Stone is a New York freelance writer. His work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Nation*, *Newsday*, the *Village Voice* and other publications. He is a former editor of *Ramparts Magazine*.

ART

Jonathan Borofsky was born in Boston in 1942 and lives in Venice, California. His environmental installations of painting, sculpture, and drawing have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Kunsthalle Basel; Institute of Contemporary Art, London; and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Richard Bosman was born in Madras, India, in 1944 and lives in New York. His work has been shown at The Drawing Center, New York, and Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York.

Cindy Sherman was born in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, in 1954, and currently lives in New York. Her black-and-white and color photographs have been included in exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio; and Metro Pictures, New York.

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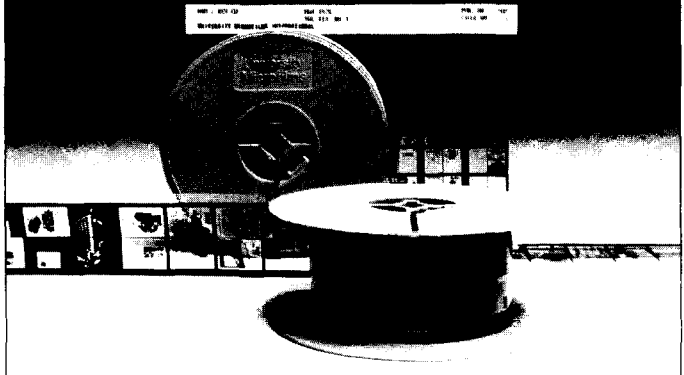

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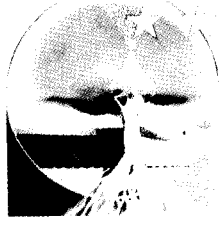

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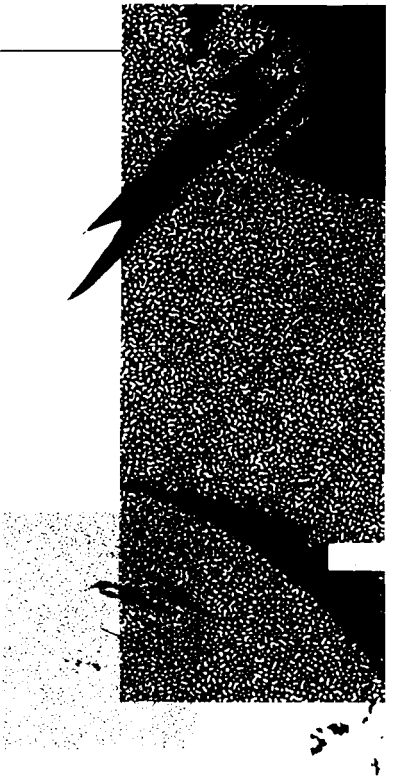

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